

# HORNETS' NEST



**Heskin** is a bank robber. A train accident appears to eliminate his chances of escape, but amid the wreckage he talks to a dying man and changes identity with him. He eludes justice but is drawn into a labyrinth of international espionage which leads him to the Arctic North Cape of Norway.



# **HORNETS' NEST**

*Books by Christopher Landon*

A FLAG IN THE CITY  
STONE COLD DEAD IN THE MARKET  
HORNETS' NEST

# HORNETS' NEST

*by*

CHRISTOPHER LANDON



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**To My  
Mother**



# I

THE man lying beside Heskin took a long time to die.

Both were held fast, their feet higher than their bodies, heads close together. Heskin tried to move but one ankle was held, gripped in a vice. As he looked up to where his leg disappeared in the crack where the seats of the compartment had telescoped together, he could only hope that the foot was still there. It had no feeling.

For his companion there was no such benefit of doubt. Mercifully unconscious, free of the trap—but at what a cost. He turned his eyes away from the little he could see of those terrible shattered ankles.

They were lying on what had been the corridor side of the train, on a bed of débris: coats, cases, newspapers and broken glass. The pale, dusty light that filtered through from behind must come from a jagged hole through which part of a wheel and the springs of a coach bogie pressed down, ponderous and menacing. There was another carriage on top; it must have been the hell of a smash.

As he fought his way up from that sea of oblivion, Heskin knew that he could not have been ‘out’ for long; there was still a fog of dust in the air, and almost complete silence. Then, like the tuning of an orchestra, separate dreadful sounds broke in one by one. They came from all directions, eerie, disembodied: groans, the hiss of steam, a woman whimpering the same phrase over and over again . . . like a cracked gramophone record.

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Heskin fumbled in his pocket for matches and when he had lit one, held it as high above his head as he could. It did not help much—only enough to give a clearer view of the face beside him and the first sight of his suitcase. . . .

He leant over the still figure, staring until the match burnt his fingers; now that resemblance was not so striking, for the face was pinched in about the nose and had that waxy look of finality. There was no need to spend any time on the second thing: the suitcase had been caught in the jaws of the closing seats and stuck out high above them, burst open. A trail of shirts and underclothes hung down from it, but in the gaps between, he could see the bundles of money. Some had fallen down to come apart. Around and beneath him, like a carpet of leaves, was the litter of pound notes.

They rustled as he fought to free himself, to get up and gather the damning evidence that lay so close. But there was no movement—not even pain—from his imprisoned foot. He was caught like a rat in a trap.

The struggle ended quickly and he lay back exhausted, sobbing as he stared up into the gloom. Other sounds were breaking through that dreadful chorus now: hammering and normal voices that shouted in action and not in pain.

Heskin did not answer them. He lay still, trying to think what to do.

A spark of humanity broke through the cloud of impending disaster and he bent forward to reach for one of his shirts, tearing it into strips. He strained forward but could not reach the man's ankles, so, throwing the rest of the shirt over that slobber of blood and splintered bone, he went to the next point—behind the knee. With hard

lumps of money from his pocket, padded with notes that he gathered up from around him, and strips of the shirt, he managed a form of tourniquet. Then he lay back, huddling close to the warmth beside, thankful for any form of human contact. As the face close to his showed clear and white in that half light, his mind began to grapple with the impossible odds, the millions to one chance that had brought them together like this.

The other stirred and opened his eyes. Recognition came back with a faint tired smile.

"Hello, my familiar," he whispered, "what has happened to us?"

"There's been a bad accident. I think there is another coach on top of us."

The man said. "My feet are hurting—terribly. I want—" He tried to sit up.

Heskin held him back for he could not let him see. "You rest," he said, "I've fixed you up as best I can." Then he felt in his pocket. "Would you like a cigarette?"

His companion shook his head and lay back still, with eyes half-closed.

For the first time there was inclination to listen to the detail of the sounds building up round them. Suddenly, very close, there was a deep tearing noise and a stream of dust spattered down on their legs while the prison shook. Heskin looked up in time to see the flange of the great wheel poised there, slip inches further down in their direction.

Then he panicked: screaming, shouting anything and everything as he wrenched to free that foot. As faintness stilled him, an ice-cold hand was laid on his.

"Do not exhaust yourself, my friend. For you, it is

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better to wait patiently; for me, it does not matter—I am going to die."

There was a silence between them while those withdrawn eyes searched Heskin's face. Then, the whispering voice went on in that precise, too perfect, English.

"That being so . . . the only thing I have left, is curiosity. I would like to talk, if you don't mind. Who are you—my double—where are you going—and what to do . . . ?"

Another groan of tortured metal from above and more dust showered on them. This time Heskin dared not look up. Perhaps death, hanging so close, made him answer in truth.

"My name doesn't matter. But I'm a bank clerk—and I'm on the run."

The faint smile came back. "We are all on the run, my friend; always, from something—from the moment we can think, until we die." His eyes moved up to the grinning wound in the suitcase, then down to the money that lay all around him.

"So—the police?"

Heskin nodded.

There was a sigh and then his voice went on, fainter, more hesitant.

"I, too, was running . . . but for once, towards something . . . and now . . . I shall . . . never . . ."

The words faded as the eyelids fell flat. Propped on one elbow, shouting at regular intervals, Heskin watched the breath quicken and almost vanish, watched every line and angle of that face—the closest likeness to his own. The fear that had been there when he first saw it had gone. Now there was wonder—and deep down, growing, a desperate calculation. If only . . .

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His next shout brought back reality: from behind and above came an answering call and at his response a faint voice spoke directly to him.

"We've fixed you," it said, "save your strength until we call again."

Now he was committed. As he lay back waiting, he thought how easy it all had been—how fool-proof—until this accident.

*He had taken his time and picked a Saturday, market day. And that peculiar Saturday was also the last away match of the season for the local football club. All morning cash had been pouring in to the sub-branch of the bank from the traders' stalls in the market square; all morning he had watched impatience grow in his fellow clerk—the glances at the clock, the banging of ledgers, mirrored with more discretion in the behaviour of the manager. Both were ardent club supporters and had been itching to get away.*

*He had smiled to himself—and let the speed of his own work slow down; once or twice his eyes had drifted to his suitcase standing in the corner. He wondered if a glance at the contents would have wiped that smug look off old Tompkinson's face: a few unmarked clothes wrapped in old telephone directories was curious baggage to be taking for a week-end with an aunt in Worthing. But he had had to do that—to disguise lack of weight; in case anyone had chanced to pick it up.*

*The work had gone on. At eleven came his turn for the counter and during the change-over he had remarked on the rush, adding that he, at least, was lucky in not having to catch his train before three. Then it had been amusing to watch that seed of information germinate—the jerk of his companion's head at the manager the next time he appeared from his office and their whispered con-*

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sultation. The rest had followed naturally. Within five minutes a cough at his elbow announced old Tompkinson's presence: lanky, stooping, with those ridiculous black tramlines of hair plastered back over his bald dome. God, how Heskin hated him.

"Heskin, I wonder if you would mind finishing the closing today. Morris tells me you are in no hurry—and he and I want to get off sharp."

As Heskin slipped a band back on a packet of notes and put it back in the drawer, he was treated to the nearest thing that ever approached a smile.

"Of course, Mr. Tompkinson. And I was going to ask you—will it be all right if I come in a little late on Monday? It gives me so much longer in Worthing if I don't have to travel back on Sunday night."

"Yes—if you're not too late."

The manager had turned back to his office and Heskin to the next customer. As he took the cheque, he had marvelled again at the incredible slackness. Tompkinson was asking for it—he made it too easy. Why, if those keys had not been left lying about one day, the idea would never have occurred to him. As he counted out the notes, he was congratulating himself on having thought up that bit about Monday morning. He had expected it to give him a few extra hours before they discovered . . . .

After the doors of the bank had closed, the speed with which the other two had packed up was ludicrous. He had watched from his desk while deep in his trouser pocket he had fingered the key-ring—that special key-ring that held his pass-key and those of the others that had been left unguarded long enough for him to take impressions. In the evenings he had had all the time in the world to cut duplicates.

After the bumping of ledgers and the crash of drawers, the manager had stood for a moment looking at him.

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"I've set the time lock on the strong-room—so don't close the door while you're inside, or you'll be there till Monday. Don't forget to set the burglar alarm and leave the lights on."

For the second time there was that apology of a smile: "Have a good time, Heskin," he had said.

"I'll try, Mr. Tompkinson."

Then the front door banged shut and he heard their feet hurrying across the pavement.

He had given them twenty minutes grace. He had idled over the work of clearing up except for one quick dash to empty his suitcase of its load of directories and throw them under a table in the corner. Then into the strong-room. He had smiled as he used the three pass keys in turn; smiled at the caution of a Bank that ensured nothing could be opened except in the presence of three—but ignored the human frailty of carelessness.

He remembered now what he had been thinking as he put the fivers to one side and stacked the bundles of used pound notes tight on the bottom of his bag—that it was an even chance he might be caught, and that was the only worry. The money was there and he was taking it as the only chance of getting out of the groove. Whatever happened, he would not pretend he was in the least bit sorry.

He had broken the seal of the last bundle and stuffed some forty of the notes into his breast pocket. Then he closed the case and made a last check on the identity card bought in Soho months before. With a click of finality the strong-room door closed behind him, the lights were switched on and the burglar alarm set. Then he was outside, closing the front door.

As he walked across the road with his suitcase, the policeman on the corner touched his helmet.

*It had been as easy as that.*

The sounds of rescue were getting closer all the time.

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Only now was he aware of them: the tearing of debris just behind him, a grunting and the rasp of heavy breath.

A cheerful voice said, "Got you." Then, "How many down there?"

Heskin strained back but could not see. "Only two of us," he said.

"Are you bad?"

"I'm all right—just pinned down. But my friend—" he gave a quick look at the unconscious face, "—he's dying, I think."

"Poor sod," said Cheerful Voice. It was like talking to someone on the telephone. There was a sound of straining timber as he changed his position.

"Look mate, I'm six feet from you and can't get no closer. I'll get the doctor, but I don't think he'll be able to do much if he can't reach. And I'm afraid you're going to take a lot of getting out of there. You see, we can't cut through from this side—on account of the coaches on top. If we weaken there, the whole bloody lot will come down—"

As if in emphasis, there was another shudder from above and more dirt fell.

"Blimey!" said Cheerful Voice, "I'd best get out for the doc. It's arse first—so it may take a bit of time. Is there anything you want?"

"A drink," said Heskin.

"I'll see what I can do. Keep your pecker up, mate. The heavy cranes are on their way and they'll whip this lot off in no time." Then the grunts and heaving slowly faded away behind.

When they returned, a new voice spoke. "I'm the doctor," it said. He listened while Heskin told him of

their state. "Well, I can't reach you," he said at length, "and if you can't get to his ankles, you've done everything possible. I'll pass in some morphia—in case he comes round and is in pain. A drink for you, too. But don't give him any. You'll pump out any blood there is left in him."

Heskin waited. In a little while there was a scraping noise, and then swaying over his head was—of all things—a child's shrimping net. He reached up and caught it, taking from the mesh the white box of the drug and half a bottle of whisky.

"Thanks," he said.

"Pinched from the waiting-room, mate," came Cheerful Voice, muffled and distant.

"Stick one of the needles into his arm and press the capsule," said the doctor. "I must move on, for there are other poor devils wanting me. Hang on, for it won't be long now—the heavy cranes are starting to work."

Heskin listened to the noise of the procession fading away in reverse. Then he had a pull at the bottle and, defying all natural caution against fire, lit a cigarette. As he lay back watching the smoke drift across the white face beside him, his mind went back again to yesterday.

*It had been fool-proof.*

*In the train to Paddington and across to Victoria he had played the dutiful nephew off for the week-end. When he had reached the station, he had gone straight to the Continental Booking Office and taken a second-class single for Paris. A contrived and heated argument over change made it certain that he would be remembered when the hunt started.*

*From there to Charing Cross, where in six shops he bought everything to clothe himself from underclothes to waterproof and*

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*a new suitcase. Then, in the station cloakroom, he had changed right through, transferring money and his few unmarked clothes to the new case, his cast-off skin to the old. The latter he had then forwarded to Sevenoaks, luggage in advance, "To be called for". After an early meal in the faded hotel in a back street off King's Cross, he had locked himself into his bedroom to wait for the morning.*

*The last job had been the sorting. He had gone through the money note by note: any one traceable by cashiers' mark that could not be rubbed out was torn to shreds. And with the unwanted railway tickets for Paris and Sevenoaks, they were flushed down the toilet. He had slept very well.*

*Then to this morning—only now it seemed an age ago. There had been the slow calculated walk to the station, with just enough time to book a single to Edinburgh and careful selection of an empty first-class smoker a few minutes before departure. Edinburgh? . . . Any big town in the north would do . . . anywhere to drop off and fade into the background, hide the money and then work his way into some cash racket. . . .*

*He had been buried behind his paper, the guard's whistle shrilling on the platform, when the carriage door had crashed open. Someone stumbled over his legs, a bag had been thrown on the seat opposite and a panting body had slumped into the far corner. A quick glance showed a tall dark man in a camel-hair coat. Then Heskin had gone on with his reading.*

*They were out of the tunnels and up the grade to Finsbury Park when the uncomfortable pricking sensation started and he knew that he was being stared at through his paper.*

*Suddenly, he lowered the barrier and caught a glimpse of the other's eyes just before they flicked away. Making a business of lighting a cigarette, he stared back—and the uncomfortable feeling magnified a hundred times, transferred itself to the pit of the*

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*stomach. HE KNEW THIS MAN—the face was horribly familiar. . . .*

*His companion got up and turned to the mirror as he fiddled with his tie. When he sat down he was staring quite openly and smiling.*

*Heskin cleared his throat. "Haven't we met before," he said.*

*The smile broadened. The voice came low and pleasant, the accent too precise for an Englishman.*

*"Strange meeting, my friend. But we meet everyday—each time you shave. Look in that mirror."*

*Before Heskin had risen and turned to look in the glass, he knew the answer. He had been looking at his own face. The man was his double.*

*There had been laughter, small talk and the promise of a drink to celebrate the meeting later in the journey. Then both had gone back to their reading. It was on the down grade to Hatfield, when they were gaining speed with every quarter mile post, that it happened. The brakes went on hard; once—twice—and a third time with force that made sliding wheels scream on the rails. Then, like the break of a wave, a horrible splintering roar swept down the train from the front. He remembered, like a photograph, the look on the other's face and the sight of his own suitcase poised rocking on the edge of the rack. As he tried to curl his legs up in an effort of protection, the compartment had burst and the partition walls had closed in on them with a snap.*

*Then darkness. . . .*

There was a stirring beside him and the dark eyes were open and looking up towards his suitcase. The voice went on as if there had been no pause.

"You took—that—from your bank?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

It seemed that truth came easily to Heskin, "I should think about five thousand," he said.

"If they do not catch you—when it has gone—what then?"

Heskin shrugged, "I shall find something."

The ice-cold hand found his again. The eyes were on him and then each word cut painfully.

"I could offer you so much more . . . if only . . ."

It fitted in with all those thoughts the plan that he had, had started. "If only—what?" he said, almost brutally.

"I will give you everything. Identity—passport—possessions—if you will continue my journey."

"Where were you going then?"

"Norway."

Norway . . . Above them now was the rattle of chains: rescue was getting very close. But Heskin was not thinking of it. That word and one other, with all their implications raced round in his mind. A passport had been the only weak link in his plans; he had thought of trying to buy one, but it was too expensive, too dangerous. Now, it was offered and fitted exactly into the pattern of the other word.

"Norway."—He repeated softly. He was thinking of his mother . . . that plump fair-haired woman he could hardly remember. How she had told him those tales of Trolls and Giants from her far-away native land, so patiently had taught him her mother tongue. He had hated it and put it to the back of his mind, but he had never forgotten his Norwegian. Now, it fitted. . . .

"What can you give me?" he said carefully, "soon you will—"

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"I? In a few minutes I shall know the final answer. But do you want me to take a chance of salvation for you with me, you fool?"

There was a silence and then Heskin said. "What must I do?"

"Swear you will go on."

"I swear to try."

The hand gripped his arm again. "I'll take that—there's no time to tell all—nearly gone. It's hidden . . . something if sold . . . to the right people . . . rich for life. . . ."

"Where—What?"

He took no notice of the urgent question. He was lying quite still, staring up at the roof. "Change everything in our pockets—now," he said. "It will be amusing . . . to be buried . . . as an absconding bank clerk. . . ."

He was silent as Heskin bent over making the change. Soon, the contents of every pocket had been transferred and Heskin had taken possession of keys, passport and a bulging notecase. Then he bent down till their faces were almost touching. "Now tell me," he said.

The voice faded to a whisper. "Listen carefully . . . address in my wallet . . . Tromsø . . . contact at once. She has map . . . but,"—he gasped—"she DOES NOT KNOW WHERE. Don't trust . . . until you have seen . . . map." He paused, drawing on the last reserve. "Credit . . . 100,000 kroner . . . Norske Bank . . . Bergen . . . practice signature from passport. . . ."

It was like catching the last drips of water from a broken pitcher. Hating himself, Heskin took a hard grip on the injured man's shoulders. "Where is the place?" he shouted.

The eyes, filming, turning inwards, were blank.

"Nordkapp . . . under Hornets' Nest . . . you . . ."

The head fell against him. The clang of hammers and rattle of chains was rising to a crescendo just above him. The heavy cranes must be nearly ready to make their lift. He stayed quite still, holding the body close and then there was a last movement as the head turned, then the voice came again in strong matter-of-fact tones.

"I think you should know that she——"

In mid-sentence, as a light switched out, his head fell back and he died. Heskin laid him back gently; there was nothing to learn now.

As he waited in the gloom, staring at the pale still face fingering the wallet in his jacket pocket, he hardly noticed the sudden quiet as the cranes took up the strain. He did not see the great wheel above him jerk and inch up out of the jagged hole. After the one urgent shout, there was only a second's terror before everything rushed down with a roar to carry him away. . . .

The nightmare went on and on.

Between the sickness and the fumes of ether, Heskin was walking in a garden. But the trees and flowers seemed to have strange leaves: green pound notes hung from every branch and stem, to flutter and whisper at him as he passed. Always, at his elbow, that precise voice repeated over and over again, "Go on, go on—you can't go back." Breaking free from this to the surface of reality was the nicest thing that had ever happened.

Even before he tried to open his eyes, the smell—clean bed linen and furniture polish—told him that it was a hospital. When he tried to look round he found that it

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was one-sided vision, for something thick and warm was strapped over the left side of his face. One arm was lying stiff and heavy at his side. A dull ache flowed up his leg. As memory came flooding back, he started to search the room for something he dreaded to find.

From the high white bed and the mound of pillows that backed him, past the bedside table with its shrouded clutter of bottles and dishes to the bare walls and polished floor. It was not there—it must be on his blind side.

The pain surged up as he twisted over to see. But there was no one sitting in the chair on that side of the bed—no blue uniform with the light from above the bed glinting on silver buttons. The police were not there, waiting patiently.

The relief was so intense that tears started to prick his eyes. "I'm Bergman," he whispered, "Bergman . . . Bergman. And I shan't remember anything else." Then, puzzled, his eye went back to the one alien thing in the room. By the window, in the hospital jam-jar, makeshift for a vase, was a sheaf of flame-coloured gladioli. Who would send flowers to Bergman. . . ."

The door opened and a white stiff-rustling nurse came in. As she came round to Heskin's good side and bent over him he saw that she had ginger hair, buck teeth and a face like a horse.

"So you've come back to us at last. You've been a naughty boy, Mr. Bergman. All that shouting about hornets and trying to get out of bed. Now, promise you'll be good."

He knew she would be a tyrant; but from that first moment he loved her for using that name.

He said, "I'll try. Who sent the flowers?"

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She looked surprised. "Why—Miss Rassmussen, of course. Her address was the only one we could find in your papers, so we had to wire her as next-of-kin. She sent them—and a letter, too."

"Can I have it? And the rest of my things?"

"When doctor says so. But it's the middle of the night now. Try and sleep."

As he drifted off he puzzled a little about the flowers—and this Miss Rassmussen. Was this the one he had heard of in the shattered compartment—the one not to trust—the one that had the map. Problems were starting a little too early.

The doctor looked round the screen when he repeated the question in the morning.

"Of course—do what you like, so long as you keep still and don't worry. Do you know that you are a very lucky man, Mr. Bergman?"

Each time that name was spoken, he felt better.  
"Lucky?"

The doctor was drying his hands. "To come out of that lot alive—notwithstanding a crushed foot, a broken arm and concussion. You got the last two when the carriage on top came down on you. You do remember, I suppose."

It would have to be done so gently, so very carefully. Heskin tried to look puzzled.

"I can remember being in the carriage with someone—caught. But before and after that, there's nothing."

The doctor did not seem surprised. "Complete amnesia is very common after a clout like that. Don't worry—it will all come back."

He came over and stopped at the end of the bed.

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“—And having said that, I’m going to be the first to worry you. Do you think you will be up to seeing someone—say, tomorrow? I would put it off—but they are hanging round the place and generally getting in our hair.”

“Who are?”

“The police.”

## II

WHEN they left him alone with the small pile of Bergman possessions, he picked up the letter with the Norwegian stamp first of all, struggling to free the sheet of paper from the envelope with his one good hand.

April 26th,

Bregarde 7,  
Tromsø,  
Norway.

Dear Herr Bergman,

I was so worried to have no news of you and then hear of the dreadful accident from the hospital. I am so thankful you are better and send these flowers by telegraph to show that I am thinking of you. Get well soon and come over just as soon as it is safe for you to travel. I cannot tell you how anxious I am to meet you and learn what you bring. Until our early meeting, then,

Your sincere friend,  
Marianne Rassmussen.

There was no help there, so he turned next to the passport.

It announced that Mr. Erik Bergman was a British subject, an agent, born in Birmingham on 27/3/11: that he had hazel eyes and black hair: that he was 5 ft. 10 ins. and resided in London. The only other point of interest was Mr. Bergman's addiction to foreign travel: the visa pages were nearly full with exit and entry stamps in a

variety of colours. Before he put it down, he looked again at the title page. ERIK—it was an unusual way for a British subject to spell that Christian name.

The note-case gave the best haul. There were no personal papers that gave any clue, but in the back pocket £194, mostly in fivers. Best of all, folded with it a letter from the Bergen Bank: it announced receipt of a draft from Berne of 100,000 kroner together with specimen signatures, and awaited further instructions.

They would get them. Here was clean, untraceable money—£5,000 would be a good start, even if he threw all else to the winds. Just go to Bergen, collect, and vanish. But as he thought of it, stronger and stronger came back the memory that urgent voice whispering, ‘swear you will go on’ and his own promise to try. He must. With a sigh he turned to the brief-case.

Its thickness was soon explained, for Bergman had used it as a night bag. Stuffed in the front pocket were pyjamas, hair brushes and shaving tackle, and behind these his searching hand found what he had hoped for. There was a thin sheaf of papers. He spread them out on the coverlet, searching carefully to start with, then turning them over faster and faster. He need not have bothered: the sheets of crabbed black writing and the newspaper cuttings were in neither of the languages he knew. Some were in German, he was sure, and some perhaps in Italian—or Spanish. But he could not read a word of it and there was not a living soul that he dare ask to translate.

As he started to put them away, something caught his eye. Two words that repeated themselves again and again, whatever the language. Dollman . . . Hofer . . . Names, or places? . . . he wondered.

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With the next entry of Horse-Face, now known to be Nurse Chandler, he asked irritably what had happened to the rest of his luggage and his clothes.

"But you won't be getting up for weeks yet, Mr. Bergman. Whatever are you thinking of?"

"I want to see them."

She shook her head. "Nothing else has come up from the Railway people. And your clothes—we had to have them burnt—they were just—" Her voice trailed away.

When she had put him down for the night, he lay for a long time staring at the shadows on the ceiling, trying to puzzle it out.

It was a final and uncomfortable thought that there might be no chance to go on at all. The police were coming in the morning.

They must have thought him fairly important for they sent an inspector. He came quietly through the door, tip-toeing across the floor to seat himself on the very edge of a chair. With notebook open and pencil poised, he surveyed Heskin with that look of mournful satisfaction officialdom reserves for the very ill.

"I don't like reminding you of a terrible experience, sir, but we are making certain enquiries—and it seems you may be able to help us—"

Heskin said, "Of course I will if I can." Under the bed-clothes, the fingers of his good hand were biting into the flesh of his thigh. This was the point of no return. "I'm afraid I don't remember very much," he added.

"Well, we hope you will remember enough for us. There was another man in your compartment when it happened. Do you remember him?"



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He was surprised that his voice was so steady. "Not before the accident. I'm afraid I can't recall any of that. But after—Yes. It seemed so long—we were so close."

"Did you talk then, sir?"

"Some of the time. When he was conscious."

"What about?"

He tried to seem hesitant. "Can you tell me—is he—?"

"He's dead, sir."

"Then there can be no harm. I suppose, really, it is my duty—"

The inspector inclined his head. "I think you are quite right. You can do him no ill-service now."

"Well—there was a lot of money lying about—I think we both thought we were going to die—he talked about it—both death and the money, I mean. He said it was stolen from his bank."

It was surprising how easily it came out: to commit himself and set the seal on Bergman's idea that it would be amusing to be buried as an absconding bank clerk. . . . There were a few more questions, and then the inspector shut his notebook with a snap.

"Thank you very much. Mr. Bergman. I won't tire you any more. But your story confirms our inquiry. What he told you is quite true."

"Poor devil."

The inspector shrugged. "Perhaps it was lucky for him—in the end—that it turned out that way."

There was one more question that had to be asked.

"Did you see him—afterwards—?"

"I did, sir—and he wasn't a very pleasant sight. Well, I must be going—and again—thank you very much for your help."

## HORNETS' NEST

He relaxed slowly and completely as the broad blue back disappeared round the door. If the one man who had seen them both could look so straight at him as he answered that last question, then he was safe indeed. Fear—that numbing hunted fear—had gone. It would be nice to lie there, just thinking and planning. No one to worry him.

But there was another visitor to come. It was three days later; and he came unannounced.

It was at the beginning of the drowsy hospital afternoon. Lunch trays were cleared and Nurse Chandler, tidying and fuss finished, had departed to other battle-fields. Heskin was propped up now, with the precious note-case and passport under the pillows behind him and the brief-case on a hook beside his bed. With his left hand he was trying to scrawl the draft of a reply to Norway.

Slowly, he traced the words, then stopped to see what he had written.

Dear Miss Rassmussen,

Thank you very much for the lovely flowers and your note. It was good of you to think of me. I am just as anxious as you are over the delay, but I am sure you know that it is beyond my control. I will bring the little I have just as soon as they will let me travel. My nurse is writing this as I cannot yet use my . . .

“That’s just the job,” he thought. “And I shall, truthfully, be bringing something—those words that Bergman,<sup>—</sup>”

The thoughts died suddenly. Through his concentration he felt the pricking fingers of uneasiness reaching up

## HORNETS' NEST

through his mind. He was being watched. He looked up and saw a face peering at him round the edge of the door.

It was a little face—and not a nice one. The sloping bald head was fringed with sprouts of sandy hair, the eyes narrow and bright: beneath the long thin nose, a ginger moustache hung like a curtain over the mouth.

The face looked at him, eyes unblinking. "Mither Bergman?" it lisped.

"Yes," said Heskin.

In a flash the short body was round the door and scuttling across the floor towards the bed. In one movement it seemed to scoop up a chair, slide it beneath itself and sit down. All the while, the eyes never left Heskin's face. Now they were at a range of three feet.

"Mither Bergman," it said again, "--my name ith Hopkinson. I've come about the paperth."

"Insurance": the warning flashed through Heskin's mind. "It might be some claim of Bergman's over an accident policy. They might want proof of identity. Careful."

"What papers?" he said politely.

Mr. Hopkinson went straight on with his theme

"My employerth want to relieve you of a rethponsiblility for documents they do not think you are in a pothition to handle."

Relief changed to annoyance. "The only papers I have are my own—and I can look after them myself, thank you. Who are your employers, anyway?"

The little man ignored the question.

"My employerth inthruit me to thay in return they are prepared to let bygonth be bygonth. And in the future you will not be molehted—in any way."

## HORNETS' NEST

"Would you mind getting to hell out of here?"

His good hand was still lying on top of the draft letter, the bell-push was far back on the same side behind the pillow. It was impossible to cover one and reach the other. The little man's eyes slid up obliquely to the brief-case hanging on the wall, then down to the hand that covered the paper.

"Writing letterth?" he said.

Through the silence came the brisk click-click of heels on the parquet of the passage, and the little man uncoiled like a spring. He lunged sideways, driving an elbow into Heskin's ribs, with one hand tearing at the paper while the other reached up the wall. The beginning of a shout ended in a strangled grunt and the brown figure was half-way back across the room before the door swung wide and Nurse Chandler walked in.

The little man did not pause: holding the brief-case in front of him, he put his head down and charged, butting her in the pit of the stomach. With a crash, they skidded together in an untidy heap against the doorpost; then he was up on his feet and away, Chandler, holding her side, a bad second. There was a quick rat's patter of feet, followed by her slower pounding stride. Someone shouted and a swing door banged twice. Then silence.

No one was quick enough to stop him. It was questions, statements, the police all over again. They passed it off as a raid by a sneak-thief and readily accepted his story that he had awakened from a doze to find someone brushing against the bed.

There were no more visitors. As the days went by he became almost glad that the problem of trying to decipher those papers had been removed from him. Somehow, he

was certain they contained the story, not the clue. He, only, carried the broken fragments of that in his head.

And there was one further consolation. The part of the draft letter that had remained in his hand after the struggle contained the three important words. . . . "Dear Miss Rasmussen." . . .

The days went on: through convalescence, the learning to walk again, the visit of the tailor to fit a new suit and his journey into the town to buy a few necessaries. Then the day of discharge, bill paid, fit and ready to go on. The exchange of letters with Norway had culminated in a wire. *Have booked room Bristol Hotel Bergen meet you on arrival.* He stood on the station platform on that last morning, waiting for the express to Newcastle. He had one small bag, a first single to Bergen and no more than forty pounds in his pocket. As he counted it for the last time, he remembered that it was all—until he could touch that bank deposit. And that was on the far side of the drag-net of passport and customs.

He stood there, lonely and a little bewildered, holding the travelling grip in his left hand, for the other arm was still in a sling. From down the line came a faint whistle and then all around him was the pandemonium of impending departure. Just before the great bulk of the engine slid by to blot out the sunlight, there was one of those momentary chasms of silence.

In it, somewhere behind him, he heard a remembered voice, sharp . . . distinct. . . .

"Thath him," it said, "—with the little brown bag—and no hat." The rest was lost in the hiss and clank of the passing engine.

Somehow, he kept his head. He put down the bag;

then, bending as if to fumble with his shoe-lace, turned quickly to glance upwards. There was only time for one glimpse; but it showed, pressed back against the bookstall behind him, the little brown ferret of the hospital, clutching the arm of a giant.

He was so tall, that the hurried upward look had no time to reach his face: there was only one impression—grey. In turn, his eyes took in the suede shoes, the knife-creased trousers and the mackintosh: nothing but grey . . . and the stillness. As he turned towards the carriages, the old thrill of fear shot through him.

It was strange to sit in a train again; quietly, with no thoughts that the rocking might start, the splintering roar hurl itself down on him for a second time. Quite deliberately he tried to think of what it had been like—anything to shut out the memory of that hateful voice he had heard on the platform. He opened his book, but the words were just a blurred jumble on the page. Again and again, the voice kept niggling . . . “In return for the documenth, you will not be molehted. . . .” So what? They had the documents now, though he doubted they had done them much good. There were other, more urgent things to think of. Prying customs officers and passport officials.

Suddenly the light in the compartment dimmed as if a cloud was passing across the sun. A great bulk was blocking most of the window space on the corridor side.

It was the same grey mackintosh bulging over massive shoulders, but now he could see the face under the wide-brimmed hat, half in profile as the man leant on the window rail, staring out over the countryside. It was square—

## HORNETS' NEST

that face—with the long chin and gigantic lantern jaw; the forehead a great cliff jutting out over sunken eye sockets. Before the man turned to look straight into the compartment, Heskin knew exactly. One of those lonely stone idols on that island in the Pacific had come to life. Easter Island . . . he had seen photographs.

He dropped his eyes to the book and held them there while fear pricked out sweat on the back of his neck. When he dared look up again, the stranger had gone.

Soon the steward came round, ringing his little bell for lunch. Heskin waited until the one other occupant of the compartment got to his feet and made for the door. Then he followed. Any company would be better than being alone.

As he turned down the corridor towards the restaurant car, he saw a long grey form detach itself from the far end and start moving forward. He pressed on the heels of the man in front, listening through the swaying journey down the train for the soft-padding feet that he knew were closing in behind: through the last connection, past the steaming kitchen and into the car itself, where the chief steward was waiting to allocate places. The man in front was shown to the last seat at a table for four and, as Heskin was waved to an empty table for two, he saw the attendant's eyes and smile of welcome tilted up behind him to a point far above his head. A second later the grey bulk brushed by and turned to sit down opposite.

Separated by no more than two foot of tablecloth and jingling jumping crockery, he was no longer fearsome, only impressive. The actions that followed—the exact squaring of his knives and forks, the opening and tucking of a table napkin—were slow and precise, as if part of a

## HORNETS' NEST

carefully worked out plan. Then he looked up to where Heskin was struggling, one-handed, to lift his bag on to the rack.

"Allow me, sir."

The voice was deep, harsh, and somehow cold. He leant forward and took the bag, lifting it slowly above them. It seemed as if his hands were reluctant to lose contact.

"Thank you."

"Not at all. I should have offered sooner. Travel must be difficult. Your arm is broken?"

"Yes, I had an accident."

Then the soup arrived and there was only trivial, broken conversation until the coffee was served. As the steward left them, the grey man came to the point.

He removed his napkin, folded it carefully, and then felt in his pocket. As the flat leather cigar-case was offered across the table, Heskin noticed the hand holding it—broad as a spade, the back covered with fine black hair.

"A cigar, Mr. Bergman?"

"No, thank you."

"Do you know Bergen well?"

"Bergen——? But how——?"

The other laughed at the look on his face. "There is a label on your bag—with name and destination," he said softly.

"As a matter of fact, I don't know it at all."

"You go on holiday—or a business trip, perhaps?"

Heskin had had enough. "Entirely pleasure," he answered as he signalled to the steward for his bill. "Thanks, I can manage," he added as the other rose to help him with his bag.

When he left the table, there was no attempt to follow him: perhaps, after the short stiff bow, the eyes lingered a little too long on the bag, but he stayed where he was, utterly still, drawing slowly on his cigar. Perhaps Heskin had been wrong—it was a coincidence. There were other things, more urgent, to worry over at that moment. He had to get on that boat.

He was so keyed-up for the ordeal he had imagined that there was no room for other fear. When it was over, with a simplicity that was laughable, his returning confidence made him cease to care.

There was a dream-like quality in the walk down the long echoing passages of Tyne Quay at Newcastle, the few questions asked and answered, and the dull thud of the stamp on his passport. Then afterwards, the flood of relief that came when, in the quiet of his cabin, he heard, above the hum of the generators and the hiss of forced draught, the clangs on the engine-room telegraph. SLOW AHEAD. . . . It was goodbye to the grind from nine till five, the cheap digs, the bad cooking, and the smell and feel of counting other people's money. . . .

He did not talk to the grey man again that night. He almost forgot him. Once in the saloon after dinner, once the next morning during his walk round the deck, he saw the tall figure regarding him from a distance. It was after lunch that they met.

Heskin was aft, in the place at the stern rail where, the night before, he had watched the last black line of England dwindle as the night slid up from the way ahead. Now there was nothing but the empty rim of the horizon with the white path of the *Jupiter*'s wake stretching over the edge. The harsh voice spoke behind him without warning.

## HORNETS' NEST

"Still looking back, Mr. Bergman? I have always thought that to be a mistake."

"There's nothing much else to do," said Heskin, "I'm just killing time, waiting."

"Ah, yes," said the grey man, "thinking of your coming holiday, no doubt." He had come forward to the rail, and, pulling on a long cigar, was staring down at the hissing trail of the wake.

"Your holiday," he said, "will you spend it all in Bergen?"

"I'm not really sure yet—we may move about a bit."

"We——?" He had turned to stare at Heskin.

It was a stupid slip, a natural one with his mind always groping forward to all that lay ahead. But it had to be covered. Afterwards, he wondered just why he said what he did. "I'm meeting my fiancée" he added quickly.

They touched for the first time as the great hand shot out to take his. The fingers that wrapped round his palm felt like steel rods and his own thumb recoiled instinctively from the rasp of the stiff black hairs against his skin.

"Then I must congratulate you doubly. Norwegian girls make fine wives. Do you plan to marry soon—and then live in England?"

"Quite soon, I hope. And, of course, we shall live at home."

He was still turned towards Heskin, head tilted on one side, the hollow, dead eyes searching his face.

"You puzzle me, Mr. Bergman—your occupation, I mean. I would guess you belong to one of the professions."

"I'm an agent," said Heskin brusquely. "And you?"

Leaning on the rail, the other examined the ash on his cigar.

## HORNETS' NEST

"I suppose that is what you would call me, too. I buy—things—and sell them. I've been in business a long time—and I think I can claim a measure of success. Some say I'm hard, but it is not really so. I will always pay a fair price; but if anyone is obstinate—too greedy—then—"

With a quick jerk he tossed the cigar-butt over the side: both watched as it curved in a long arc to die with a hiss in the creaming water. "—Then they go down like that," said the grey man softly, "I always get what I want in the end." He straightened and looked at his watch. "Come up to the bows for a moment, Mr. Bergman. I would like to show you something."

As they walked along the deck, the hand that encircled Heskin's arm felt like an iron band. The voice went on, sad and cold. It reminded him of long grey waves breaking on rocks.

"There is one thing I have learnt in my business experience, Mr. Bergman; that whatever the enterprise you undertake, it is well to understand exactly what you are doing. To foresee the final outcome—and weigh every chance of failure or success. That is something I always try and pass on to my friends. It is good advice—you agree?"

"Very." said Heskin.

There was a cool breeze on the foredeck. The clamp did not relax as they went on past the capstans to the very stem.

"There." The grey man pointed as he let go. "It looks so beautiful. But it can be hard—cruel—and sometimes so unexpected."

At first it looked like a long white cloud on the edge of

## HORNETS' NEST

the sea. Then Heskin made out the blue-grey of the foot-hills and, behind, the high mountains still dusted with snow.

Norway.

### III

ALL afternoon that coastline hung before the ship, growing longer, larger, splitting into detail. All afternoon Heskin had been left in peace to stare at it, leaning on the deck-rail, rapt in his own thoughts as he tried to puzzle out the next move.

The next move. . . . His eyes were not taking in the slow and beautiful change that was unfolding before them, he did not really notice the woven green pattern clear into rounded pine-clad hills, the scattered splashes of colour grow into gay-painted wooden houses that nestled among the trees. Only the message of increasing size was registering in his brain. The grey man faded into the background as, minute by minute, Norway grew larger . . . closer . . . the time of the meeting in Bergen nearer. Was she an ally?—perhaps. But the danger to him could be greater than anything of the enemy he knew.

There were three possible ways to play it. To hang round long enough to collect the bank credit, and then clear out alone; but with two following, then—and where could he go? To stay with this girl whom he had been told not to trust, hoping that some form of bluff would give him time to find out the past and consolidate the future; or to save all complication of lies and throw himself on her mercy with the unbelievable truth.

The first and last were both too dangerous; in each lay the possibility of a trail being laid back to England . . . and gaol. It would have to be the middle way; how, he

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could not yet see. Perhaps loss of memory would work; however thin and futile it sounded, she would have to believe it. Only one thing was certain: she had far more need of him. He smiled as he thought of the four words Bergman had whispered.

They were rounding the long thin spit of green fields and yellow sand that protects Stavanger harbour when that voice came suddenly from over his shoulder.

"I hope I did not presume in thinking we might travel on together, Mr. Bergman. I would like to show you a little of our country."

Heskin thought fast: he looked down first to his suitcase, standing against the rail, then up to the dead pebble eyes. "I can't really tell you yet," he said, "there may be a message for me here—but I think it more likely I go on to Bergen."

"The message will be from your fiancée, I suppose?"

"Yes." Damn the man—he never forgot a thing. It was something else that would have to be sorted out.

"Of course, your plans will depend on how she has arranged your holiday—a stay in the mountains—or a voyage up the fjords."

"Quite." Heskin stooped to pick up the case. "Well, I had better go and find out." The other stood there, staring at him.

"You have plenty of time. I will wait here. Do you want to carry that case all over the ship? It will be quite safe with me."

It was Heskin's turn to smile. "Thank you—but they are my personal papers and I think I had better take them. It would be an unfair responsibility for you if anything went wrong."

## H HORNETS' NEST

"Well, I hope yo ib  
have to be there ond u stay in Bergen for a few days, as I  
each other. But in at business: we might see something of  
you dine with me tohei any case, if you stay on board, I insist  
can watch the first night. Let us make it late, so that we  
light goes. I will passage through the fjords before the  
wait here for the answer to your  
message."

Heskin made a slow ad to report it was Be be w tour of the ship before going back  
trying to slip off at soi gen after all. He had thought of  
with that tall grey figu his first port—but how could he,  
way. In any case, he try c standing at the head of the gang-  
... and the money. ny

"Excellent," said the ele grey man, "let us meet in the bar  
at six." Without waitir turned on his heel, movin g for refusal or acceptance he  
lowering of the gangway.

It was a strange meal, b ut not the ordeal Heskin had  
expected. The grey man wa s a good talker and seemed  
determined to keep the conver sation away from anything  
that concerned their past or fu ture. Heskin was only too  
glad to listen and, indeed, it ws so he who asked the first  
question.

As he stirred his coffee, he said "You haven't told me  
your name."

His host blew out a stream of cig

"Forgive me. It is very rude. Bu as r smoke.  
your bag quite put introductions ou seeing your name on  
was a pause. "Mine is Grästein . . . agn of my mind." There  
the tongues of smoke that were snakin it." Heskin watched

It was late when they had finished round his head.  
to be wished a friendly goodnight in and it was a relief  
the public glare of

## HORNETS' NEST

the lounge without having to brave the darkness of the deck. He went straight down to his cabin.

After he had switched on the light, he stood for a moment and looked at the neatly folded pile o' blankets on the top bunk. He had quite forgotten that his cabin companion had mentioned that he was leaving at Stavanger. Then his glance went down to his own berth.

Unbelieving at first, then with a quick sick surge of fear, he started the futile hurried search; he leaned back against the door, sweating . . . It couldn't be. They had been together nearly all the time. . . . Then, there must be another of them on board. It didn't really matter how it had been worked. His suitcase had gone.

The worst was not the loss, but that it should vanish. He took out his wallet and thumbed through the foreign notes that were left. Five hundred and thirty kroner was all he had; a passport, and the clothes he stood in. He must report it, and, more important, warn his ally that the hounds were on the trail. But was she his ally? He remembered Bergman whispered words. But he would have to go on to get more money. He would have to risk that.

At the purser's office, the word suitcase was hardly out of his mouth when it was lifted up and placed on the counter in front of him

"It was handed in by one of the stewards only ten minutes ago, sir. He found it on 'B' Deck. Would you mind signing for it?"

As he signed—and the Bergman signature was coming easily now—he said "When do we dock?"

"About six-thirty r. And we try to get the ship clear in an hour to help the turn-round."

## HORNETS' NEST

"Would it be possible to make a telephone call then?"

The purser looked doubtful. "Well, we get our land line aboard by about seven. I suppose you could, if you care to come down here then."

"I would be most grateful if I could. It's very important."

He carried the suitcase back to the cabin and bolted the door. Nothing had been taken from it, but he knew that everything had been handled. Perhaps he would have been happier if something had been missing—and he had not noticed that the lining of the case was slit, with a razor blade, very carefully all round the edges.

In defiance of company regulations, the door remained bolted. But he did not sleep very well that night.

Voices, the rattle of the steam capstans, and the scrape of a gangway being hoisted inboard, woke him.

The cabin was quite dark, the port-hole showing nothing but the dim heave of weed and barnacles on stout timber. He dressed quickly, packed his bag, and then drew back into one corner of the bottom bunk, chain-smoking, as he waited for the bustle and noise of footsteps to die down in the passage outside.

In ten minutes there was no sound beyond the door: even the drumming of the planks of the gangway had thinned to sharp individual sounds. His hand was on the bolt when a heavy tread came louder, clearer, each step sounding from the distance of the passage. He flattened against the wall, holding his breath.

The sound stopped. A pause, then a light rap on the door panel.

"Mr. Bergman." The harsh voice sounded urgent.

He stayed frozen, watching the slow turn of the door

## HORNETS' NEST

handle and then the bulge of the wood towards the jamb as pressure was exerted from outside: as he swallowed, the noise in his<sup>o</sup> throat sounded like a thunder-clap. There was another knock, his name called louder and then the steps more hurried now, died away to silence in the direction of the main staircase.

It was cold in the thin air of a northern dawn, but he found he was sweating. It was another ten minutes before he dared slip the bolt and hurry down the deserted passage to the purser's office. While he was waiting for the Bristol Hotel to come through, he kept glancing back over his shoulder. But there was no one to be seen in the lounge beyond the glass door. Then he was talking to the hall porter.

He said, "My name's Bergman. Erik Bergman. I believe there is a room booked for me by Miss Rassmussen."

"Just a moment, sir."

There was a pause, and then the porter's voice came again.

"That's right, Mr. Bergman. And Miss Rassmussen is already here, waiting for you. She would like to speak. Hold the line and I'll put you through."

Her voice was low and warm, but held authority.

"Marianne Rassmussen here. Where are you, Mr. Bergman—what's happened?"

"I'm still on the *Jupiter*. But I had to get hold of you before we met. There's trouble already."

"What—?" The cut in the voice went deeper.

"I've been followed—all the way from the hospital. And my bag has been stolen and searched."

"Was there—anything—in it?"

"No."

## HORNETS' NEST

"Then, how can I help?"

"There's a big man—square face—big chin—always dressed in grey. He says his name is Grästein."

"I don't know him."

"Look—there's too much to explain now, but he's been talking to me—asking questions. I slipped up once, and the only way I could get out of it—was by saying you were my fiancée."

There was so long a pause that he thought she had hung up: then her voice came back, cold, careful.

"It must have been a very intimate conversation—to qualify me for that honour."

"I'm sorry. I know it was an impertinence—but it couldn't be helped. The point is—if I can't shake him off—and he sees us when we meet—try and act as if you were——"

There was a cynical little laugh from the other end of the line.

"I'll do my best. But don't bother to get rid of him. Come straight away. I want my breakfast."

"How shall I know——?"

"Know me? You won't. But I shall know you, so it will be all right."

He stood for a moment after the click of her receiver, staring at it. She knew him and she had spoken nothing but English. But Bergman had not been an Englishman, he was sure of that; then, perhaps of some other nationality, unable to speak Norwegian. So there might be another card for him to play—perhaps the trump. On his part there would be no speaking of that language, but a lot of listening.

He climbed up on deck and had a quick-look round.

## HORNETS' NEST

Neither there nor on the almost empty quay could he see any sign of the grey man. Then he let his eyes lift to the first sight of Bergen, the clean, white, shining city set at the head of the long fjord, splashed with colour by the gay suburban houses rising in tiers among the tumbled firs of the foothills. Down the gangway and across the quay, hurried through money control and passports by yawning officials, longing to get the last passengers through and themselves home to bed. Then out of the dock gates and into the first taxi on the rank.

"Bristol Hotel."

The fear of the cabin had fallen away now: there was the greater danger looming ahead, coming closer with every second. He sat forward on the seat, staring out of the window, thinking of what he would have to do. He did not see the other car, the black saloon, that pulled out directly his cab started moving and fell in behind in the stream of traffic.

Down through the old town, the wheels rumbling on the cobbles of the fish market, then running smoother over concrete streets flanked by blocks of chromium and plate glass. The cab jerked to a stop and he was walking up the steps towards the swing doors of the Bristol.

Inside, he stood still for a moment, uncertain, his eyes wandering over the groups of people. Then, from his side came the quick click of heels on the marble floor.

"Erik, dearest."

Two arms were round him and a soft cheek pressed on his. The hair against his face was long and silky and smelt of honey. Then she stepped back, still holding him as she looked up to search his face. And he saw she was beautiful. Always, he remembered that moment.

## HORNETS' NEST

Her face clouded. "Oh, but you look so drawn—so tired. Come and sit down."

She drew him over to one of the sofas, against the wall, sitting half-turned towards him, still holding one of his hands. Then her eyes went up, over his head, towards the entrance.

"Stick to English—and don't turn round—" her lips just framed the words—"a big man—grey raincoat—looks as if he had been carved out of a piece of rock—"

"Yes."

"He's just come in . . . now he's looking this way . . ."

She dropped her eyes to his. "Quick. Before he comes. How much does he know?"

"Only what I told you."

"I don't mean that—the other part—how you came to help—"

She stopped suddenly and Heskin could feel the shadow of the presence standing beside them. He turned and then scrambled to his feet.

"Why, Mr. Grästein, how pleasant. I did not think I would have the opportunity of presenting my fiancée. This is a fellow passenger from England, darling. Mr. Grästein—Miss Rassmussen."

The grey man gave a stiff bow. "The pleasure is mine," he said, "—the more so because it is unexpected. When I saw your fiancé hurry off the ship, Frøken, I thought there must be a train to catch . . . and by now, you would be well on your way to the mountains . . . or the fjords."

Marianne sat very still as she looked up at him.

"We should have been. But Erik is so tired—I had not realised. He must rest for a few days before we go on."

## HORNETS' NEST

Grästein's eyes did not leave her face. "You are fortunate, Mr. Bergman, in having a fiancée who makes up her mind so quickly."

Marianne got up.

"Now, you must excuse us. Erik must have some breakfast—and then go to his room to rest. Goodbye, Mr. Grästein."

Again there was the short bow and a wintry smile. "Only *au revoir*, I hope—Frøken. I am sure we shall meet again." He turned on his heel and went out through the swing doors.

In the lift Marianne said, "Grästein . . . how appropriate."

"Why?"

She gave him an odd look. "But naturally, Grästein—means 'grey stone'."

As he shaved and washed, he could see her in the mirror above the wash basin: she was lying stretched out on the bed, hands clasped behind her head, cigarette in her mouth. Between the lathering and the strokes of the razor, the last pieces of detail completed the picture in his mind.

She was tall, slim and small-boned, with the length of thigh that gave her the lithe swing of a man's stride as she walked. The face oval, with very fair complexion and short square chin, the cheekbones high and flat that gave accented slant to eyes so deep a blue that they were almost violet. But, as in that first moment, it was her hair that was fixed in his mind. As she changed her position, the light played over it with the illusion of colour and movement of ripe corn in the wind.

## HORNETS' NEST

Then the moment he had been dreading came as he wiped the last of the soap off his face. She took the cigarette from her mouth and stubbed it in the ash-tray: the question—and his Norske was coming back fast enough to let him know it was the direct one—nearly took him by surprise. He managed to turn slowly, putting down the towel, his face blank.

"Let's stick to English," he said.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Why——?"

To gain time, he sat on the other side of the bed, fiddling with a shoe-lace. "Can't we leave everything for a few days? What you said in the lounge is quite true. I'm all in.

She did not seem to hear this. "Tell me, how bad is that arm of yours?" she said. At least, it was in English.

"Very nearly all right. I can leave off the sling in a day or two."

There was a pause. "I should," she went on quietly, "it looks odd when you forget and start to use it." Then she swung her legs down to the floor. "I'm sorry, I know you should rest but there just isn't time. We sail on Thursday, and I haven't got half the stuff yet—I couldn't, until we had talked."

She got up. "Well, I'll leave you in peace until after lunch—I've got one or two things to do. But I shouldn't go out, if I were you."

"I must get some money some time," he said.

"Haven't you got any?"

"Not much—until I can get to the bank."

"Enough to pay your bill here?"

"Yes, I think so—but why?"

"Because you are leaving this afternoon. I'll come

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back at two, then we can go out for our talk—somewhere quiet—then to the bank and on to my flat."

He did not like the tone of command. "But, I can't stay at your flat," he said slowly.

"Can't you? After our talk—I think you have to."

At the door she turned and stared straight at him.

"—And don't forget—when we talk—I shall want to know everything."

## IV

THE quiet place for their talk was Fløien—the lovely rolling pine-clad bluff that rose straight up behind the city. They hardly spoke on the journey to the funicular, nor during the slow ride up. As town, harbour and bright blue fjord unfolded beneath them, the boats moving on the water looked like little white-tailed beetles.

There was the usual crowd of tourists and Norwegian holiday-makers on the train, but no sign of the grey man. They had a cup of coffee at the little restaurant at the top of the hill and when he had paid the bill, Marianne said, "Let's walk."

They wandered off along one of the sand paths that wound among the thickets of pine and heather. It was very quiet and peaceful. Marianne hardly spoke.

He realised that she was moving with a purpose. Then at one sharp turn of the path she stopped and looked back over her shoulder. "See if there is anyone coming the other way," she said.

"No." He had taken a step forward to peer round the angle. There was nothing but the yellow ribbon of sand, with the green and purple of thicket hemming it in.

"Quick, then." She parted the branches on the outside edge of the corner and almost pushed him through. As he crouched in the green gloom, she took his hand and started a quick slide down the bank of heather and bilberry; in fifty yards they came out into sunshine, on a little grassy plateau that jutted out from the side of the

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hill. The back and sides were screened with trees, but in front the ground fell away so steeply that it seemed as if they were floating above the pointed tops of the firs far below.

Heskin stared out. "How lovely," he said.

"Yes. I found it when I was a little girl. I've been back often, though not since the war. I've always been happy here."

He turned to look at her. She was sitting, stretched out, with her back against a stunted pine, picking the needles and wisps of grass from the front of her slacks.

"Are you happy now?" he said gently.

"I don't know—perhaps—it rather depends on what you tell me." There was no change in her voice: only now again, she was speaking Norwegian.

He made a vague, defensive gesture with his hands.  
"Can't we stick to English?"

She stared at him.

"English, English—why always this English? Are you afraid—or ashamed—of your own tongue?" Then she looked away. "Any language you like, as long as we get started."

"Where do we start?"

"With you talking—a lot."

There was finality in her voice. He watched her leaning back against the tree, the sunlight shafting down to play over her hair. He sat down by a boulder, pressing against it, feeling the warmth soaking through the back of his shirt. For a moment, as he gathered himself, he looked out over the valley.

It was a perfect summer day: cloudless and utterly still. In front of him the rounded tumble of hills stretched

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away in every direction, shimmering blue-green in the heat, slashed in places by the glint of water. Beyond, remote, the purple haze of mountains was capped with snow. From far away came the dull rumble of a train: close, nothing but the weight of sunshine and the lazy buzz of honey bees. A little breath of air drew the scent of the woods across his face, unbearably sweet and strong. He had been wrong about that day in the hospital with the inspector. This was the point of no return.

"You will understand the choice of English in a moment," he said quietly, "for I'm going to tell you a long story. I don't expect for a moment you will believe it—though it happens to be true. All I ask is that you hear me through to the end."

"Go on."

With eyes closed, head tilted back against the sun, he started to tell the truth.

It came easier than he had thought: the bank, his flight, the meeting in the train and then the crash. It was so close that he seemed to be re-living those days in hospital, the theft of the brief-case, the trip over. All through the long time he did not look at her. There was no sound but the crackle of pine needles, as she changed her position, and the hum of the bees. But he knew she was watching him, and when it was done, turned to see. She sat, chin on drawn-up knees, arms wrapped round them, as she stared straight at him.

"I've thrown myself on your mercy—completely—by telling you all this," he said.

Her voice seemed to come from a long way off: level, hard, almost disdainful.

"You are not Erik Bergman?"

"No."

"But an English bank clerk—a thief—who has taken Bergman's name to escape from the country. You have never been to Norway before, and do not speak our language?"

"That is right."

"Then—why come to me?"

"I told you. You wrote—and I had to come to Bergen to collect his money. I had no other. And I wanted to help."

"How could you——?"

Now he was angry and tried to match his tone to hers.  
"There is one thing I haven't told you. *I know where.*"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. Bergman told me just before he died. You do not know it. And, in case you think you can steal it——" he touched his forehead—"the knowledge is only here."

"And you will tell me this——?"

"Only when you *believe* what I have told you."

There was a long silence. "You don't believe it, do you?" he said.

She got to her feet and dusted herself. "No. Not one word of it. Though it is a clever story. Very clever, it covers everything. I shall have to think, but for the moment, I am inclined to let you try and convince me. So we will go on."

She was standing very close now, her eyes nearly level with his. "As long as you understand one thing—that if there is the slightest suspicion of funny business on your part, I shall hand you over to the police."

He almost laughed. "That wouldn't help you. You

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couldn't prove a thing. The police have closed the case."

She smiled. "I wasn't thinking of the English police. I meant ours, here. They have long memories."

"What do you mean——?"

"Oh, nothing. Now, let's get down to the bank."

As they walked back along the path, she said suddenly, "Won't it be difficult—at the bank, I mean—what about signature?"

It was so much easier now. "I've practised, copied from his passport. And that's why I kept the sling. In case it isn't quite right."

"You're marvellous," she said, "you think of everything."

It was easy at the bank. Without any of the tension he had imagined, there was just the scrutiny of passport and letter, a pleasant conversation with a duly sympathetic official, some clumsily contrived signatures, and then they were outside on the steps, with a letter of credit for all Norway and a well-filled wallet stowed deep in his pocket. As he signalled for a taxi, he said, "What now?"

"To the Bristol—to get your bag—and then back to my flat."

"But I don't see why——"

"I do. I don't trust you——" She stooped in mid-sentence, gripping his arm. "Look, do you see—over there. That is the third time."

He stared across the street between the movement of bicycles and cars. "See what?" Then the taxi had slid in front of them, blocking the view.

She was in first and across to the far side of the seat, peering out of the window. "He's gone now," she said, "but there was a man, standing there watching. And

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I'm sure he was in the compartment below us when we went up in the funicular."

The flat was in a big block, on the fourth floor. It was small, two-roomed, and spotlessly clean. The big windows, bare polished floor and birch furniture gave everything a clear light airiness. But even with the gay cushions and the frills, it had not the look of a woman's place.

As he lowered his bag to the floor and looked round him, Marianne went towards the inner door that stood ajar. She tossed a sentence over her shoulder as she went through. Before the door clicked shut behind her, he had a glimpse of the bedroom, the end of a divan, and the corner of the dressing table on which stood a large photograph in a silver frame.

He stayed quite still when she had gone. She had said, "Help yourself to a drink"; that whisky and glasses were in the cupboard. He wanted that drink—but he could not take it. She had spoken in Norwegian again.

When she came out she walked straight past him and into the little hall. He heard a key turn in the lock. She came back, slipping something into her pocket. "In case you resent that—and think to take the key away, I shouldn't. I had training in the war. You would get hurt." She was still speaking in Norsk.

He tried to keep his face expressionless. "I'm sorry. I don't understand."

The line of her jaw hardened. "Don't you want a drink?"  
"Yes, please."

"I told you to help yourself." She turned towards the cupboard and there was a clink of bottle on glass. She came over with a drink in one hand and pointed to the arm-chair with the other.

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"You had better sit there—and don't talk to me—I want to think."

It seemed a very long time that he sat watching her pace up and down, lighting cigarette after cigarette, dragging at them in jerks, stubbing them out half-used. Suddenly she said, "I'm going to telephone," and went into the bedroom, closing the door.

Treachery—? But she would not have done it there, or said what she was doing. He strained hard to listen—he dared not move from the chair—but her voice was only a murmur through the door. All he did know was that she made two local calls, for he heard her dial them, and one trunk which took a long time to come through. When it did, she seemed to do most of the talking.

When she came back, she helped herself to her first drink and he saw, with regret, it was the last of the bottle. Then she went to the window, parting the net curtains to stare down into the street for a long time. The silence hung heavy between them.

"Come here, Erik." She said it suddenly, but he did not move. "That's not my name," he said.

"It will have to be. Come here."

She did not turn round when he was beside her; just pointed downwards through the chink in the curtain.

"Do you see—down there. In the archway, just in the shadow?"

He stared down into the chasm between them and the block that reared up opposite. "There's a man, I think. I can't see very well. I suppose he's waiting for his girl—"

"Waiting for us, Erik. I saw him clearly a moment ago. A little fair-haired man in a brown jacket. The same one I saw outside the bank and lost. The one that came up in

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the funicular in the next compartment. The one who was waiting in the lounge of the Bristol when I came down from your room. Now, I am sure——”

She turned to face him. “At Fløien, you asked if I believed you, and I said not a word of it. I mean that. All I believe is there,”—she jabbed her hand downwards—“the common enemy. And they are not stupid.”

Her urgency reached out to him. “What do we do——?”

“Move on—and quickly. I’m going to see about it now.” She was in the hall putting on a top coat. “It is better I go alone. And, for my peace of mind, I shall lock you in.”

He threw his wallet on the table. “Isn’t that security enough?”

“No. You could always cancel that letter of credit and get another. Also, it is as much to stop others getting in—as you going out. But I need some money. I will keep an account.”

She pulled some notes from the wallet and put it back. She was at the door before he said, “Your English—where did you learn it——?”

“At school—and then I was in England for a bit. Surely you must have embroidered that bit to Mr. Grästein—when you were telling him of your fiancée . . . ?”

He was puzzled, and her stare made him uncomfortable.

“No. I told you that was a slip—I just covered it like that, without going into detail.”

She said, “I’ve thought a lot about that part. It was a master touch to make us engaged. Did you really not tell him of our mutual interest?”

She was through the door before he could answer and rage welled in him as he heard the key turn in the lock. He walked to the window and stared down into the street.

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After two or three minutes he saw a figure detach itself from the archway opposite and stroll off to the left . . . the foreshortened angular figure was too far below to identify . . . but it had a brown coat . . . and the time was right, she would just be coming out into the street. In a way, it was comforting to know there was a common enemy.

He passed the rest of the time in a futile search of the flat. There was only one thing he found, and that was not a clue, only further bewilderment.

In the bedroom, on the dressing-table, there was no photograph. It was a small point, but he could swear he had seen it through the bedroom door when they had first come into the flat, had had the fleeting impression it was of a man. He bent down and squinted along the top of the table. There was a long faint mark in the film of the day's dust. It had been there—and she had put it away.

She was back within the hour, coming in quickly to place a brown paper package on the table.

"You were followed," he said, "I saw it from the window."

"Yes, I know. He wasn't very clever, and perhaps it may be a good thing. He was just behind me when I got the tickets and he must have heard where they were for."

"Tickets——?"

"Yes. We leave for Oslo on the night train. The fares and sleepers were two hundred and twenty kroner. Then I went to the Vinmonopol. That was another fifty. Here is your change."

"Vinmonopol——?"

She stared at him for a moment. "Sorry. I forgot you

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know nothing about Norway. The Vinmonopol is the State wine store—the only place you can buy spirits. As we won't be going out again until we leave for the train, I thought you would like another drink."

"But Oslo," he said. "Why Oslo?—it's in the wrong——"

"Don't worry—you won't give anything away. I know we have to be North of Tromsø, only not exactly where. But Oslo—we are not going there. They are following, they heard me book the sleepers, and will be certain it is our destination. But there are a lot of stations on the way where we can slip off and make for the place I have in mind."

"And that is——?"

"A little farm in the mountains near Lærdal. Ideal to lie up in for a few days."

"So that was where you were telephoning——"

She was on it in a flash. "And how did you know that—the English bank clerk that speaks no Norwegian——?"

"I don't. But when you were telephoning, it was obvious you made one trunk call—you didn't dial—and waited a long time for it to come through."

There was a long silence.

"Well," she said, "we may as well have that drink. Then I'll pack and get us something to eat. It will be too late on the train."

If they were shadowed to the station, he did not notice it. It was only later, on the train that the first contact was made. They were standing outside their sleepers, smoking and talking in snatches about nothing that mattered, always watching the view unrolling before them, when the squat man in a raincoat came down from the head of

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the train to pass them. As he pushed by, Heskin saw for a moment the little pig-eyes, felt the fan of tainted breath on his cheek. The man swayed on down the coach and out of sight.

Marianne leant forward, her face against the window. "That's that," she said, "he's the one at the station—and the bank. I'm certain of it."

"What do we do——?"

"Wait."

The train rumbled on up the valley in the long summer twilight.

Always, on one side or the other, there was a river winding below, slashed in places to white by rapid or waterfall: behind that, the sombre banks of fir stretched up like soldiers on parade. Always above, the high mountains hemmed them in.

It was an hour before Marianne said softly. "He's back."

"Where?"

"Behind me—at the end of the coach—just by the toilet."

She came close to him, slipping an arm round his waist, leaning her head against his shoulder. "As your bâncée, I suppose I am allowed to look soppy. Do you mind?"

He did not mind—did not even care how she said it. His face was close again to that soft, sweet-smelling hair. Her voice went on, very quietly, almost in his ear.

"He's watching us. Now listen. The next three stops up the line are Hol, Al and Gol——"

Heskin giggled. "Where's Hell?"

For a moment she took it seriously. "Oh, that's much farther north, near Trondheim—no stop fooling, and

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listen. After Al—somehow—you must get him up this end of the corridor, *beyond* my door—and facing you. I shall have gone to bed."

"What then——?"

"I'll do the rest."

Between Hol and Al, she made the pretence of a peck at his cheek and slipped her arm from his waist. The door of her sleeper clicked shut behind her. Outside, the twilight was nearly done; the unending march of trees only a dull blurr, the lights of hamlets showing like star clusters in between.

The corridor was empty now. The closed sleeper doors and the dim blue lamps stretched away in perspective to the shadows of the end. Beneath, the clack of the wheels went on in steady monotony. Heskin leant against the window rail, looking down towards the shadows. There was a lighter patch blended vaguely among them . . . then a glow of a match struck . . . the man was still there. Things always happened to him on a train.

The lights of Al had slid away behind and the guard had passed on his round when Heskin made the move. He slid over to the door of Marianne's sleeper, bending close to it in a pretence of listening; as he did so he beat a faint tattoo with his fingers on the panel. At once the answer came from the other side. She was waiting.

He turned square towards the end of the coach, holding the window rail with one hand as he made a quick, urgent gesture of summons with the other. The blur in the shadow took definite form as the man came forward a fraction into the light. Heskin repeated his movement; the other took one more step, then froze again, his arms hanging in front of him loose and straight, like an ape's.

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Suddenly, he seemed to make up his mind and came down the corridor in a shuffling run. They were close now: the little pig eyes glinted, unwinking, and the smell of garlic made Heskin feel sick. He backed away a pace further and waited. The two of them were alone in the creaking, swaying corridor, the dim lights giving a feeling of being deep down under the sea.

A thick voice said, "Yessss. . . ?"

Heskin answered so softly that the other had to strain forward to hear. Over his shoulder a thin crack of light showed at the edge of Marianne's door.

"Grästein. . . . Can I contact him. . . . ?"

The other nodded, his eyes fixed on Heskin. Behind, the band of light broadened as the door inched open.

"Tell him—I can't leave her—until I've got it—perhaps a week. Then I'll meet him at---"

The swish of air and the muffled TOKK were almost instantaneous: the squat man grunted and slumped forward against him. As he tried to push him off, Marianne's hands slid through from under the armpits. "Quick. Grab his feet. Back into my sleeper." When he bent to grope, he saw the wicked black cosh swinging from her wrist.

It was a matter of four steps and then the door was wedged shut behind them. They heaved the sagging body on the bunk; the upturned eyes showed as white slits and the breath came from the back of the throat in long uneven rasps.

Marianne stood looking at him while her stockinginged feet searched for shoes lying on the floor. "His hat——" she said, "it's somewhere outside. Get it."

There was still no one in the corridor and when he

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came back with the hat, but a grind of brakes and the slowing of the rhythm of the wheels told of an approaching station. "Gol," said Marianne, taking the hat and throwing it on the bunk, "this is where we leave you, friend."

Heskin was staring down in fascination.

"Will he—?"

"Die? No. He'll be out long enough for us—and have a bad headache when he comes round." The train was jerking to a halt. "Get your bag, Erik—and don't forget to shut your sleeper door. I'll see you on the platform."

They stood in the shadow of the station buildings to watch the train leave. Outside the blaze of the arc lights it was very dark and still. Marianne was close beside him, shadowed, silent, somehow far away. He watched the red eye of the tail light dwindle, flicker and then vanish. He was thinking of something quite different.

"Did you learn that too—in the Resistance?" he said suddenly.

"Yes. And a lot of other things." She picked up her bag. "By the way, I heard your words to our friend. I hope they were not backed by wishful thinking."

"Of course not. I had to say something—to keep his attention."

"Well, I hope that was all. There's not far to walk. In the square we'll find a garage where we can hire a car."

As they walked through the empty echoing streets, she said, "We're going to stay with some relatives of mine—a farmer and his wife who live right in the wilds. It will be a good hide-out. But they are simple, decent country folk, they haven't a word of English, and couldn't begin to imagine the sort of squalor we wade in. They will take

you at face value—and on my recommendation. So don't forget it."

He was very tired by the time they had roused the driver and bargained with him; it was heaven to climb into the back of the car and be tucked close with a thick rug. Soon, they were running free of the town, out into the quiet night, with nothing but the hum of the engine to soothe them. The white pencils of headlight stabbed down the road, fixing for a moment on the still straight flanks of trees before tossing them back into the darkness behind.

He was nodding now, jerking back from sleep with pricking eyelids; between the waves of blankness, it was pleasant to feel the warmth next to him and see her profile in the reflection of the lights, head resting back on the cushion, staring straight ahead. Then, the jolting of the car brought him back for the last time. They had left the road and were bumping up some track towards a single point of light in the darkness.

"Where are we?" he said drowsily.

"My uncle's farm. Near Lærdal."

He was rocking on his feet when he got out of the car, hardly surprised at the enthusiasm of the handshakes that came from the old man introduced as Uncle. He was almost unaware of the climb to the bare clean kitchen, the meeting with cousin Øle or the old lady, with a face like a withered prune who swayed and nodded from her rocking-chair without uttering a single word.

Over the bowl of broth he just concentrated on keeping his eyes open, letting the stream of talk flow over his head, without caring what it was about, without trying to understand.

At last relief came and Marianne stood up.

"Bed, Erik. And my uncle apologises that he cannot give us better quarters."

He smiled mechanically—to receive a thumping slap on the back from Uncle. Cousin Øle said something that made them both go into fits of laughter. The old lady rocked on, unheeding. And Marianne blushed.

The remark only registered in tired translation as he climbed up the ladder and through the trap-door in the ceiling. They were in the loft: deep-eaved, unpartitioned, smelling of raw pine board and hay. As Marianne shouted down a last goodnight and let the trap fall into place, his eyes travelled up from the bare floor with the two mattresses set side by side, to her hands. He wondered, in a dull exhausted way, why he had not noticed before—and just when she had slipped that wedding ring on the third finger of her right hand.

She saw his eyes, and knew he knew.

"You put the idea in my head. You started it with our 'engagement'. You knew that I dare not let you out of my sight—and when I thought of coming here, I knew that they were too simple—decent—to accept us any other way. So I said we were married."

He did not bother to answer.

She was kneeling by the lamp on the floor. "We'll undress in the dark, if you don't mind."

When she had blown it out, there was nothing but the rustle of clothes and a dry scraping sound. Her voice came softly from somewhere near the boards: "I've moved my bed . . . in case you have any ideas . . . about getting away . . . or anything else. I'm sleeping on top of the trap-door."

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He was so tired, but he could not sleep. He lay on the mattress, watching the shaft of moonlight that moved across the floor. It crept on, up the long slim length of her body under the blanket until it glinted on her hair. Then on something else . . . a deeper, steadier gleam. Her cheek was pillowéd on one hand, and under that showed the muzzle of an automatic.

He started to crawl towards it: easy to snatch before she woke up.

Then he stopped. There was no point. Nowhere to go, no way out. He needed her—her goodwill, not her hate. He could understand why she despised him, even disliked him.

But why did she hate him so?

## V

WHEN he woke in the morning the loft was empty.

Marianne's bed was pulled to one side of the trap-door, and through the opening came the delicious smell of fresh coffee. He scrambled into his outer clothes, pulled a comb through his hair and climbed down the ladder.

There was no one in the kitchen but the old woman bending over the great wood-fired stove, stirring something in a pot. She gave him that creased smile and set on a corner of the table black bread and salt herrings, a bowl of sour junket and coffee in a large copper pot. Throughout the silent breakfast, she kept on turning from her work to smile, once giving an all-knowing wink. When he had finished, he lit his pipe and went out of the house to look for Marianne.

She was sitting on the gate of the yard that led from the cow-byre, whittling a stick with a clasp-knife. In shirt and slacks, without make-up, hair pulled back tight and tied with a ribbon, she looked like a tall slim boy. She looked up at his approach but did not stop her carving.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Erik. You were sleeping so soundly I didn't like to disturb you. Have you had breakfast?"

The morning was still and soft, with the scent of the first hay drifting up to them from where it hung in low brown hedges on the rails across the pasture. Below the fields, the head of the fjord glittered like a tongue of silver,

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with the grey and greens of the mountain sweeping down from the high places to meet it.

"I've had something to eat, thanks. I want to talk to you."

She looked him up and down. "You want some more clothes—and a hair-cut. We'll walk down to Lærdal and get the bus back. We can talk then."

"No. Now." He avoided the violet eyes; nothing must distract from the building up of a shell of indifference that was the first step in getting even with her. The soft sound of the knife blade against the wood went on without a pause while the long shavings scattered white on the ground between them

"If you must—"

"It's this marriage business."

She stopped and squinted down at the point of her stick. "I'm surprised. I take it you have objections. Are they religious, or ethical?"

"Neither. I wouldn't give a damn—if there was the slightest feeling between us. But there isn't, which makes it all—", he made a movement of brushing something away—"somehow—indecency. You see, after what I've done—I can understand your despising me—resenting that we have to work together. But it goes deeper than that. There's hate."

She was still looking at her handiwork. "There's a point," she said, "have you really thought about it?"

He stared at his feet. "Anyway, it's all unnecessary, this pretence. You won't be able to carry it through on the boat."

"I've told you it IS necessary—for my peace of mind. And I've fixed the boat. One of the telephone calls in my

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flat was to the shipping company—changing our cabins to a double.”

“*You have a double cabin, you mean.*”

“I don’t understand.”

“I’m not coming, Marianne.”

She threw the stick away, hard, overhand, so that it flew turning over in a long arc.

“You will come—because you must. For you there is nothing else. I must stick to you—and you know why. Hence the double cabin.” She shut the clasp-knife with a click. “It shouldn’t have to last long, anyway. You can stop it the moment you wish.”

“How?”

“By telling me——”

He shook his head. “No. And I’m not coming.”

He was still saying the same thing the next day when they stood on the little wooden jetty at Florø. Behind them, the clean, trim town huddled round the flower gardens that centred on the dazzling white of the wooden church. In front, the still pearl-grey water of the fjord lapping against the jetty. Then the harsh boom of a ship’s siren echoed down to them from the hills, and over the spit of land on the south of the fjord floated two masts and a squat funnel with black and white bands. Soon the hull was clear as the ship came in a wide slow circle towards them. Apart from the men waiting to catch the mooring ropes, there was only one other person on the jetty beside them. He stood alone, at the far end, holding a sheaf of papers. He was a policeman.

Suddenly Marianne said, almost to herself. “There’s no safe way. So few roads and railways to watch. At

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least they can't be with us on the *Mercur*, for I know all berths are full——”

She broke off and started humming the song he had heard in snatches during their silent walk to Lærdal the day before. A twice-repeated refrain, then a cadence of tripping rising notes that he took for a chorus. In this moment of hopeless uncertainty, it was the last straw.

“I'm not coming,” he snapped.

She broke off in the middle of a phrase, nodding towards the low black hull, piled high with deck cargo, now separated from them by only a narrow strip of water.

“It's either that——” she turned to look towards the black uniform and gold buttons at the far end of the quay “—or that. I've told you so many times. There is no option.”

Towards midnight they were standing side by side at the stern rail of the ship, watching the white ribbon of wake uncoiling out into the gloom. It was the eerie half light of the long-dying northern summer day; above, the evening star gleamed pale against the black tracery of mast and derrick, while to either beam there was only the perpetual line of bow wave spreading out towards the darker loom of the sides of the fjord. The only sound was the muffled thump of the diesels and the grind of the screw beneath their feet.

Marianne leant beside him with her arms on the rail. There was a cigarette between her lips and her face was shadowed by the forward ruffle of her hair. For the last half hour she had not said a word.

He waited, sealed in bitterness as he thought back over the day from the moment he had followed her up the gangway. Over the meeting with the master, that gentle

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slow-moving man that reminded him at once of a teddy bear: the unpacking in the cabin, where he had been infuriated, instead of touched, by the bowl of flowers and the little note of congratulation on their marriage: the meal in the saloon, taken almost in silence as he tried to weigh up the four passengers who radiated in their turn an obvious, but well-bred curiosity. Last, the stroll round the ship that had brought them to this spot—that had taken them past the deck cargo. There were two cases stowed among it that he had never seen before—but bore his new name.

And there was nothing he could do about any of it until she chose.

She spoke suddenly, without turning her head.

"Still want to go ashore?"

"Yes—after I've found out all I want to know."

"Such as—?"

"You know damn well. What it's all about. Why we are here. And what happened before to make it necessary."

"And you don't know—any of it?"

"How many times have I got to say I know nothing."

She had turned towards him, brushing back the strands of hair that had blown across her face. Her eyes were big and dark and somehow luminous.

"When you choose to talk, you can have it all. You know that." She was silent for a moment. "But if we are going on playing this game—one day, soon, when I'm in the mood, I'll tell you the beginnings of a pretty story. And it will be interesting—amusing—to watch you while I do so."

She threw her cigarette out into the darkness; it curved down in an orange trail to die in the cream of the wake.

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He remembered the last time he had seen that happen; the harsh voice saying, "They all go down—like that."

"I'm not frightened," he said, "you know all my past so your story can't hurt me. All I want is to know it."

"Being afraid—and remembering—are not quite the same thing." She turned from the rail. "I'm going below. Give me ten minutes."

He let the time drag out, leaning on the rail, staring out into the murk astern, turning the whole thing over and over . . . let her talk, then . . . he was not going to. A last look at his watch and then he started towards the cabin.

"The rest of them must go to bed early," he thought, as he made his way down past the deserted saloon and then along the port corridor. His feet made no sound on the thick carpet. Outside number four he stopped and raised his hand to knock. "Hell, why should I?" He jerked at the handle and pushed straight in.

She was standing in front of the mirror that hung between the two ports and over his bunk. She had nothing on but the bottom half of her pyjamas, and she was dabbing at her face from a pot of cream. In the second before she flashed round, two things fixed themselves in his mind. One was the dark red stain that spread up her neck the moment she knew. The other was the look of her back.

It was white, smooth, a perfect taper from the wide shoulders to the deep furrow at the base of the spine. Perfect . . . except for the marks.

They were of texture, not colour. Across the space of the shoulder-blades were a row of vertical stripes where the skin seemed thinner, glistening, almost transparent.

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It looked as if she had been pressed back hard against a chair covered in glue.

"Din Jaeval!" Her voice was rough. "Don't stare at me. How dare you."

As she faced him, pressed back against the mirror, he knew that it was the violation of a secret, not modesty. She made no attempt to cover her breasts.

"I'm sorry." In miserable silence he turned towards the other wall and started to loose his collar and tie. From behind, no answer but the rustle of folded clothes and the creak of the springs as she climbed into her bunk. Then the light snapped out. He undressed in the darkness and lay down.

The bunks were at right angles, feet together. From the open ports above his came the soft hush-hush of the sliding water, from the cabin only the creak of the ship and the feel of the engines. He lay on his side, staring out into the dark, trying to see her, but there was only the gleam of the pillow and the darker halo of hair spread out on it. But he knew she was watching him. "I'm sorry," he said again.

"I don't like anyone to see my back." Her voice was calm now, almost impersonal.

"How was I to know——?"

She went on, ignoring the question. "It was in the war. I was burnt on a steam radiator."

Not "I burnt myself"—but, "I was burnt on." The choice of words started a cold chill that increased with every sentence as she continued.

"You might not know what happened, so I will tell you—and we will not have to mention it again. It was at Narvik—during the occupation—and they thought I

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knew something they wanted. So I was taken down to S.S. headquarters. As you know, only they—and the Quislings—did the dirty work. To help me—remember—they stripped my back and strapped it tight against a steam radiator. . . .”

He had to say something. “You knew what they wanted?”

“Of course.”

“And——?”

“No.” There was infinite scorn there. “So you can look at me—naked—and it will mean nothing: because you are nothing to me. But not at my back. That is different.”

He heard her turn over in the bunk. “Goodnight, Erik.”

“Goodnight, Marianne.”

## VI

So, the pattern of those days began.

Afterwards, he could only remember the theme of sunlight dappled on still water and the softening of it by the snow-tipped mountains that slid down straight, crowded closer and closer to the ship, as each narrow straight spent itself in an assault against the land. They would steam on, twenty, thirty miles into such a land-locked loneliness, to drop a small load of cargo at some remote hamlet. Always, they were the same: the thin wooden tongue of jetty sticking out into the water, the small group of farmers waiting patiently for the arrival of their goods, and behind them the huddled toy houses round the church, crushed together by the majestic sweep of mountain-side that was flecked with moving pattern of passing cloud.

These times were the climax of the strain between them: a mounting tension from the moment the port came in sight until they had searched the group on the pier head for a well-remembered figure. It would die the moment the mooring lines splashed back into the water and they were under way again. Then, with their common barrier against the enemy gone, they would slip back into the same uneasy lull, as if they were alone there. All else seemed sealed off in another medium.

The other passengers were pleasant, friendly, but phantom. The professor, a little button of a man, with his fluent English, bad jokes, and unchanging dress of shorts,

shirt and woolly cap with its large coloured bobble bouncing on top. There was his blonde wife, always smiling, and with no more English conversation than "Good morning" or "Pass the salt." The shy couple from Bergen, always holding hands. None of them seemed real to Heskin. He was on the inside, looking out.

Perhaps twice in that time there was something that happened which stayed with him. Something that could be singled out of memory afterwards.

The first, most vivid, in Trondheim cathedral. Grudgingly, she had agreed to a trip ashore, and they were standing in the grey soaring nave, staring at the one foreign splash of colour. The tattered folds of *Warspite's* battle ensign hung there, and as he watched the sunlight shaft on the red cross and the white ground, something stirred in him, to swell almost to a sob as a hand beside reached out and closed over his. But when they came out into the brightness again, it had gone.

The second time was when he heard all the words of Marianne's song.

It was at Brønneysund. He was alone on the boat deck leaning on the rail, watching the jetty and the derricks swinging out their loads of winter cattle fodder. Directly below him, in the cabin, Marianne was washing out some stockings and the sound of her voice came up clear through the open port as she sang. This time there were no fragments: it went on without a pause. He strained forward to catch the words.

"All alone, Herr Bergman?" He searched the tone for sarcasm and decided there was none. It was the professor who had come up quietly beside him.

"Yes. My wife—" it still stuck in his throat, that

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word—"is doing some washing." He nodded downwards.  
"That is her singing."

The professor's pipe started to beat time to the tune.  
"She seems happy," he said.

"Yes. She often sings that song. I wish I understood the words."

"It is a folk song we are fond of. It has a good moral. If your lady repeats it, I will try and make a translation."

Marianne obliged: the clear light voice came up to Heskin, mingling with the professor's soft asides.

"Der var en skikkelig bondeman, som skulde ut efter Øl  
Som skulde ut efter Øl,  
Som skulde ut efter Øl, efter Øl, efter Hop-sa-sa,  
tra-la-la-la, som skulde ut efter Øl."



"An old man deserted his wife one day, when he went to the inn for some beer.

When he went to the inn for some beer,  
When he went to the inn after beer, after beer, after  
Hop-sa-sa, tra-la-la-la, when he went to the inn  
after beer."

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"A student was passing along that way, while the old man was out after beer. . . ."

The tale went on: through the students' entry for a kiss, the wife's response, and the old man discovering them on his return. Then the fight, and the final indignity of being thrown down his own stairs.

"The moral of this story is—take your wife when you go after beer." The professor finished as the last notes died away. He looked up and down the deck and the bobble on his little cap jerked from side to side.

"I think there is time—for we two old men to risk a trip to the inn here—for some *Øl*. I do not see any students about, so we can leave our wives without fear."

He trotted down the gangway at Heskin's side like a little bouncing ball.

As they went up the village street, he said suddenly, "It is so nice to see—someone like your wife—finding happiness at last."

"I beg your pardon?"

But he was too deep in his theme to notice.

"You see, my friend, I, too, was in the Resistance. They even found use for poor weedy scholars. . . ." He jerked on for a few paces in silence before stopping to grip Heskin's arm.

"—But I lacked one thing for such a business, Herr Bergman, and that was courage—physical courage. When I heard one night that they were coming to question me, I knew I could not go through with it. It did not matter that I would betray *myself* through pain—it was that I would betray others. The Swedish border was only

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ten miles away, and I went over that night. So there was no betrayal."

There was an awkward pause.

"But my wife, professor, you were saying——?"

"Ah, yes. You must understand that Norway is a small place—in population. So in the Resistance, we knew almost everyone—by code-name, of course. Though we had never met—and she lived so far in the north—through an old student I knew of Marianne Rassmussen of Tromsø, and her husband. It was——"

"But it couldn't be——"

"But surely——" He stopped as they turned into the Café and did not speak again until the two tall glasses of Øl were set in front of them. Then he said; "I may be wrong. It is all so long ago. Rassmussen is very common in the north and perhaps I confuse her code-name. Of course, it may not have been your wife."

After they had drunk, Heskin said, "Tell me about those others—the Rassmussens you knew of."

But the professor shook his head. "It is better not, my friend. It would be just one of those stories that are the same after this war. You, from safe England, would not quite believe it—and the telling would pain me. Let it lie."

It was a silent walk back to the *Merkur*. It was when they had gained the boat deck that Heskin noticed for the first time the activity going on in the base of the funnel. This was a dummy, housing water tanks and a radio cabin, unused in coastal waters. Now, there was a thumping and a scuffling coming from it and, as they passed a duster shot out of the open port to be shaken with vigour.

"What's going on?" said Heskin.

"I don't know, my friend, but I will find out." He trotted off to the port-hole, just managing, on tip-toe, to get his head inside. The other voice in the conversation that followed belonged to the senior stewardess.

"She says we shall have company," said the professor when he returned. "Three passengers may join at Narvik. The berths are full, so there is nowhere else to put them."

At the head of the companion-way he paused, carefully wiping his mouth. "Do we speak to the ladies—of Øl?"

"No." said Heskin.

Marianne was finishing her work in the cabin. The soft humming stopped on the instant of his knock and she did not turn round or speak when he went in. He did not mention Øl at all, nor the possibility of an increase in passengers until they were alone together next day.

They were on the fore-deck, sunbathing. The ship was making a diversion so that the passengers could see the black ice cliff of the glacier Svartissen where it ground and crashed into the water of the fjord. Away from everyone, they lay quiet in the small triangle formed between the plates that topped the ship's stem. The hot sun pressed down on them. As they faced aft, the view showed only the empty deck and the diminishing stack of deck cargo, backed by the white wall of the bridge. At their backs, beyond the thin shelter of plating, was nothing but the waste of air and water that lay ahead. They were apart from the world: physically close but remote as strangers from each other.

He turned to look down a hawse pipe, straight through to where the blade of the stem cut into the quiet water. The bow wave turned away from it, glassy, smooth as

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earth from the plough, until the break into a welter of foam. Always ahead, just before the shadow of the hull, a few sun-fired drops splashed forward to give first warning of their passing.

The silence became unbearable. He turned back to stare down the deck, then at Marianne, watching the light fleck the faint golden hairs on calf and thigh. "What's in those cases with my name on?" he said.

"Some of the things you wrote and asked me to get," she answered drowsily.

It was like butting his head against a brick wall at every turn. He wanted to break the calm—worry her.

"Do you know that we have three new passengers joining the ship at Narvik?"

\* She sat up quickly. "How—who told you?"

"The stewardess told the professor—and he told me. They're getting the radio cabin ready as there's no room anywhere else."

There was a long silence and when her voice came it was very bitter. "Of course—we have been wasting our time. Narvik is the logical—the only place to wait. Norway is only four miles broad there. The last railway to the north comes in from Sweden, all planes and boats stop, and there is only one ferry across the fjord into Troms. It is the throat of the net. I might have known it."

"But why pick on this ship?"

She shrugged. "It doesn't really matter. Perhaps someone has spotted us already and passed on the word. But any ship, any car, any train, must pass through Narvik. They would get us anyway."

"Don't you think you had better start trusting me?" he said quietly.

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"No. But I think I shall tell you that story of mine—if you can take it."

"There can be nothing to take."

"I shall be watching you to see. Please don't interrupt."

She stiffened, clasping her arms round drawn-up knees.

"I will start with a date—and two names, Dolmann and Hofer. . . ." So they had come in at last—those names he had seen in the notebook and paper cuttings that had been stolen in the brief-case from the hospital. He propped himself on one elbow, listening intently.

"They were Germans—or rather Dolmann was, while Hofer was an Austrian. He was the more important, a Gauleiter, and a personal friend of Hitler's. At this time, three weeks before the final German collapse, Dolmann was not without his uses. He was darting to and fro between Austria and Italy and Switzerland, trying to make terms for the surrender of the Axis armies in Italy. When he got back to Innsbruck from one of these trips, he found his friend Hofer holding a load of dynamite.

"A special train had arrived, consigned to him personally—and in great secret—by Hitler. There were twenty-four chests on that train. Twenty of them contained the Fuehrer's loot—gold cigarette cases, pearls, necklaces of jewels—"

"And Hitler, Eva Braun, and Bormann were stuffed in the others, I suppose?" He was almost angry: that old, old story trotting out again.

Marianne's voice was icy as she silenced the interruption.

"This is not a joke. It happens to be true—or don't you want me to go on?"

"Sorry—please do."

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"The other four chests contained nothing more exciting than papers—except that the subject matter was rather unusual. They were the secret German archives of the relations with Russia—all through that uneasy alliance before Hitler did his 'double-cross' and invaded. Dolmann checked some. He said that the British government would be very interested to know, for one thing, what bribe Stalin offered at their expense to stave off his own attack."

He was sitting up straight now. This was a new twist. He remembered the whispered words of the real Bergman in that smashed carriage: "Something if sold to the right people . . . make you rich for life." It would indeed.

"How do you know this?"

"Dolmann told me."

"Where is he now?"

"Stateless—in hiding. He daren't come out because of his war record. But we'll come back to him later."

"Sorry, I interrupted. Go on."

"Hofer's orders were that the chests must be hidden with absolute safety and secrecy. The treasure was dealt with first because it was the bulkier. Dolmann did that job between his surrender trips—they are somewhere in the Alps, and, of course, the minute he dares, he will go back and collect them. But when he got back to Innsbruck the last time, to deal with the papers, he found that they were gone."

"Where?"

"Back north. There had been a reversal of orders by Hitler and they had been taken away by a Captain Jodl of the German Navy."

"What happened then?"

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"A gap of a few days: then three ocean-going 'U-boats' left Lübeck to try and make the desperate run out of the Baltic, up the Kattegat and round the Orkneys to the South Atlantic—perhaps to South America. The Fuehrer wanted his gambling counters as far away as possible.

"Some people say that Hitler himself was in one of the boats, but, at any rate, the fleet met its disaster in the Sound off Copenhagen. The R.A.F. caught them in shallow water and bombed them. Two were sunk, while the third, Captain Jodl's, was crippled. His extra fuel tanks and stores of food were to be no use, for though still afloat, he could not submerge and only make four knots on the surface."

"Had he still got the chests?"

"He still had the chests. He radioed Berlin Chancellery, telling them he could not attempt the ocean voyage and asking for fresh orders.

"The reply he got passed the baby straight back to him: he was to be held personally responsible to his Fuehrer for the safe hiding of the papers as far north up the Norwegian coast as he could get his ship, then scuttle her and disperse the crew to await interment. They knew the game was up—that it was only a matter of days. They said that someone would contact him later when the shouting had died down."

He was listening, absorbed now: one by one the fragments were falling into the framework of the story.

"And then——?"

"He was a one hundred per cent Nazi, Captain Jodl. Hitler was a God to him and he had been given an order that would be carried out whatever the cost. With luck—and courage—he managed to make his first landfall at

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Bodø, in the Vest fjord opposite the Lofoten Islands. But when he sailed in there he got a nasty shock. Having limped that far, moving by night, lying up each day under camouflage in some inlet, fearful of attack by the Resistance or being spotted by Allied planes, he found that no one in Bodø wanted to have anything to do with him."

"But the Germans were still in control—the war hadn't finished."

"No. But some funny things were going on in North Norway in those last upside-down days. The Underground were coming out in the open, the Russian prisoners breaking out of their camps, eager for loot and revenge. On top of this, beside having to protect themselves, the German Army were arguing whether to fight on alone or surrender when Berlin fell. Jodl dared not reveal his mission: no one had any time for him and his crippled 'U-boat'."

"Go on." He was hugging his arm round his knees now.

"Bodø, Harstad, Tromsø—it was the same in each port. And more difficult for the voyage between. For each degree he moved to the north, the Arctic night grew shorter and shorter until it did not exist at all. Then the Resistance got him: they radioed his course back to England, and north of Tromsø—he was making a last desperate try for Alta, the place that had been the base of the *Tirpitz*—a Sunderland flying boat pinned him down: He didn't wait for attack; he beached his ship. They were bombed and machine-gunned, some killed, but he and a few others managed to get ashore."

"With the papers?"

"No. He hadn't time. But he knew they were safe, for the 'U-boat' was ashore. More than anything, he needed

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the help of local knowledge—for a place to hide his cargo. They had landed at the sea end of a fjord where there was a Nazi concentration camp—one of the largest—and worst—in all Norway."

"What was its name?" he said, but she went straight on as if she had not heard him.

"Jodl contacted the commandant. He told him only as much as was necessary, for I do not think he liked or trusted the man. They agreed to go back and get the papers at once, then hold them in the camp until they had decided what to do.

"They went back in a launch at the worst moment they could have chosen. A second Sunderland, sent to make sure that the job had been well done, came down on them as they were making their last trip to the shore. They were machine-gunned and bombed as before. But this time Captain Jodl and his crew were killed outright and the commandant slightly wounded."

There was silence for a moment. He stared up at the gulls, poised without effort as they swooped in and out of the rigging; then down below him to the water, bluer now, almost milky, as the salt fjord met the ice of the glacier head. From behind came the dull rumble as a piece of the ice cliff fell away to crash in the sea.

"The commandant—" she said suddenly, "he was—oh, well, it doesn't matter."

"Who was he?"

Not once in all that time had she taken her eyes off him: now, the burning intensity behind the stare was frightening.

"If I say—the worst type of S.S.—I think you will understand, Erik."

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"Only what I have read—but go on."

"The point is that he was not the same kind as Captain Jodl. He had not the same blind sense of loyalty, nor the personal orders. He was only concerned with his own skin. He knew how nearly the war was over and that memories would be long. He saw in these papers safety—a purchase price for what had happened. He decided to hide them until he saw which way to jump. To the Russians—or the British."

"Where did he hide them then?"

"You know."

His eyes fell away from hers; of all the things she had half-said and half-hinted, this only was true. "Nordkapp . . . under Hornets' Nest. . . ." He knew that she knew. But not how little.

"Please finish it." He said abruptly.

"This commandant—he did not have the strength or the local knowledge to do it alone and he didn't trust his own kind. He wanted outside help. He picked it in his own camp. A Norwegian who had been held as a hostage . . . treated abominably. . . ."

Little cracks were beginning to appear in the thread of her story: the sentences jerked, pauses, her voice tight. For the first time she was not watching him, but turned away looking out over the fjord.

"The commandant saw this—this man—who knew the coast like the back of his hand, and offered him freedom in exchange for a safe hiding-place. The Norwegian agreed."

"But—?"

"I know—I have often wondered about those 'buts'. First, if the end was so close, why didn't he tell the commandant to go to hell and stick it out? Then, how could

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he trust for a moment the word of a man he knew to be worthless, or hope that he would be granted his freedom at all? He must have known that he would never be allowed to get away with the secret.

"I think it turned on this. You and I, we have not been shut in, starved, overworked for years, so we cannot judge what even the phantom of freedom would do to our thinking. And, though he must have known things were bad for the Germans, he cannot have guessed how near deliverance was. I think he knew they would not let him go—that he only agreed for a chance to get outside the camp and then make a break for it."

"You knew him?"

"Yes, I knew him—well."

There was a silence.

"Anyway, the Norwegian agreed; the three set off from the camp in a fishing boat."

"The three—?" But again she did not seem to hear.

"I think that the proof of his distrust was that he left hidden behind in the camp a map of where he was going—in case. It was only a rough sketch—and gave no mention of *where* it was. I suppose he knew so well himself, it did not occur to him that others might not. I have that plan—but I don't know where."

"How did you get hold of it?"

"I told you—he was a friend of mine. Afterwards, other friends got it to me—with other things."

"What happened?" The questions had to go on, but he was asking them mechanically now. There was only one thought in his mind: he was standing looking down the dark tunnel to the inevitable conclusion of this and the other story.

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"Only two came back from that trip—and my friend was not one of them. A week later came capitulation, and the commandant walked out of his camp. He broke the wrong way—east. Six hours after the Russians had caught him, he was up against a wall. The third man disappeared."

"Who was the third man?"

She said something in Norwegian, very softly. Then louder, in a tight, high voice. "It's getting very cold. We must be right on the glacier. Would you get me a sweater from the cabin?"

As he scrambled to his feet his eyes caught the flash of something that fell from her hidden face to her forearm, to roll on down it in a shining uneven trail. There was another . . . then a third. Very quietly he walked away down to the fore-deck.

In the cabin it was clean and light and intimate. Through the open ports the water was sliding by so fast and close, throwing back long ripples of light on the deck-head, white above him. He went straight to the dressing table and started a search of the drawers. His hands moved slowly, gently, letting the smooth silk froth of her underclothes slide between his fingers, the lingering contact of something close and personal.

At last he found the sweater and made a few uncertain steps back to the door. It was one of those moments that could never come again; a glimpse of something that would never be. He stopped at the head of her bunk and bent down quickly to press his cheek against the pillow. There, like a symbol, was the faint elusive echo of the fragrance of her hair.

He knew that Bergman had been the third man. He

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could see so clearly down the dark corridor of time to the final disaster. But there was no escape now save the faint hope she might believe. The story would have to unwind to its inevitable end because he loved Marianne.

Quietly he closed the door behind him.

## VII

THERE were moments in the days that followed when he started to hope; hanging on a word or gesture, magnifying them, trying to work in a meaning that might show a crack in the wall of flinty indifference. There was that night on the bridge when the ship had turned west from Bodø, heading out towards the Lofoten Islands.

Everything had been the same—the passengers, the routine of shipboard life, the view of mountain and sea. Only as they moved up into the Arctic Circle, did each night give them a little less of the respite of its name. The twilight stretched out—long, long dragging, while the red disc of the sun hung poised, reluctant to be pulled under the dark sea. And when it had gone there was an orange glow instead of night, cut now by the black cruel line of Lofoten. A chill wind was blowing from the starboard quarter.

They had not spoken for some time. Then Marianne shivered and seemed to lean nearer. As their hands touched, he felt her warmth flowing over him.

“Narvik the day after tomorrow,” she said, “and then—we will know.”

“Perhaps.”

No answer came: nothing but the tight rattle of the canvas bridge screen in front of them. Beyond that he saw the slow rise and dip of the bows against the oily swells of the Vest fjord. To the right, in the wheelhouse,

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the cheek and jaw of the helmsman seemed to float in space in the glow of the binnacle light.

"I've been thinking," he said softly, "—about that third man—"

With a rough movement she broke away from him. "So you will tell me where and leave the ship at Narvik?"

"No. But I'll tell you—if you let me stay and help you find it."

"And twist everything out of me afterwards?" Her voice was hard. "No, thank you. Let's go below. It's cold."

He turned to have one last look at the Islands. They were the same—the blood-red glow and the jagged black. He would always remember. Another moment had gone.

It had not returned when they crept up the last narrow thread of the Vest fjord towards Narvik. It was late in the night and they were on the bridge again, watching the blue-grey of the mountains fold down close to the white town and the straight clusters of masts sheltering behind the quay. Heskin peered through a pair of glasses while the captain pointed with the stem of his pipe to a long red stain lying on the rocks at the edge of the fjord.

"Destroyer *Hunter*," he said. "It must be something to remember, that action—in a snowstorm, at the dark depth of our winter, with so little space to manœuvre. If you go up Rombaks fjord, you will see the other side—five German destroyers, lying—"

Heskin did not hear the rest. The tips of Marianne's fingers were biting into his arm. He turned to see that her binoculars had left the wreck and were fixed on the end of the quay.

"The throat of the net, Erik," she said.

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Seen through the glasses, foreshortened, standing out like a cardboard figure, the grey man looked far taller than reality: perhaps it was the head and shoulder advantage he had over the other figure that stood beside him as they watched the *Mercur* come in to dock. Heskin saw the arms rise and then there was the queer sensation of looking directly into another set of lenses. The grey one bowed down to his companion, who turned and started a stumbling run back towards the main block of harbour buildings.

"Reinforcements," said Marianne.

The gap narrowed and they could watch him now with the naked eye: a tall drab column, hands in raincoat pockets, relaxed, waiting, utterly still.

"We've got to carry it off," she said. "Wave."

In answer, he raised his arm once and then relaxed into the first stillness. Now the mooring ropes were out and the strip of water between narrowed to a few yards. They were beginning to look down on him. Marianne's voice rang clear across the gap.

"Herr Grästein—how nice. What a pleasant welcome to Narvik."

He did not answer but swept off his hat with a flourish. Heskin stared in fascination at the square dome of skull covered entirely by a black haze of short hair. When at last the grey man spoke, his voice blended perfectly with the scream of the gulls wheeling overhead.

"Frøken—the surprise, and pleasure, are entirely mine. I had no idea."

So it was to be pretence. But Marianne's reaction was the shock. Heskin could hardly believe the giggle as he leant over the wing of the bridge looking down at him,

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nor the perfect balance of naïve pride in her tone as she answered.

"Not Frøken any more, Herr Grästein. I am Fru Bergman now. This has become our honeymoon."

He stared at her in grudging admiration. "You're even waving the ring at him," he thought.

The reinforcements had joined by the time the gangway was in place and two men moved up the planking behind Grästein. Both were short and square, and one was their friend of the train.

Then came the introductions.

"Two Finnish colleagues of mine, Fru Bergman—Herr Pavl and Herr Gleb. They travel back north with us to their native land—the wastes of the midnight sun."

Both men bowed, while flat eyes did not leave their faces. Both were of the pattern of slanting cheek-bone, regulation raincoat—and the unaccustomed, uncomfortable look of wearing their plain clothes.

Grästein stood looking round, rubbing his hands together. Then in two strides he was across the deck, peering through the door of the room in the base of the funnel.

"These are our quarters? Capital." He turned to the two behind him and broke into a series of jerked hissing sentences. They picked up the bags and went in.

"They are good boys," said Grästein, "But have practically no English. It is a pity you do not speak Finnish. Or do either of you, by any chance?"

They shook their heads.

"I was telling them of your situation," he went on smoothly, "that in these close quarters, we must do our

best——” he groped for the phrase—“to avoid playing the gooseberry.”

Then there was that bleak smile and a sweep of the hat. “But now I must go and pay my respects to the captain.” He turned on his heel and went forward to the bridge.

Heskin leant his elbows on the deck rail. “What do we do now?—Get off the ship?”

“And have them follow?—No. We must hang on and think. There must be a way—there must——” She was beating the timber with her clenched fist and when he looked at her, he saw she had gone very white.

“What’s the matter?”

“I told a lie just now. I speak Finnish fairly well. It was not what he was speaking to those men, Erik. It was Russian.”

“So what——”

“Who held the commandant of the German concentration camp? And how much did he tell—or was made to tell—before they shot him?”

He often wondered where Grästein had acquired the slang of ‘playing gooseberry’, or if he knew what it was supposed to mean. The interpretation was that they were never molested but always observed. Apart from formal bows at the dinner table or a guttural “Morn, Morn”, they had no direct contact with the Finns. Grästein alone, never too often, never too long, would break into their solitude with some remark about the weather or a discussion on some point of interest they were passing. As suddenly as he came, there would be the break, that wintry smile and the abrupt departure. And

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with each visit came mounting tension, the searching of each ~~pleasantry~~ for a second meaning, the sudden relief when he left. . . :

Once, when he was between them, the great hands spread out on the rail, Heskin saw Marianne stiffen and edge away. When he had gone, she said. "Those hands—they make me feel sick—I dream about having to touch them. There must be a way out, Erik. We've *got* to think of one——"

That was the theme. It hung over them as they steamed on north with no night now and the wilder snow-splashed mountains hanging poised to fall on them in the narrow strips of water. Their personal difference, the impact of the passengers and the rest of the crew all faded into the background. Marianne was jumpy, sleeping badly. Over and over again came the cry . . . "there must be a way."

It was the last night before Tromsø, when the captain came over to Heskin, alone on the bridge.

"Do you see the narrows ahead, Herr Bergman?" He pointed to where the cliffs of Bystraumen closed in to a thin vertical cut. "It is a feature of this country that, where the mountain is steep and the fjord narrow, there always is very deep water. As we pass through, I'm going to start the echo-sounder. If you would like to watch, come down to the chart-room."

It was a small room below the bridge, almost entirely filled by a table strewn with the current-chart, ruler and dividers. Round the walls were racks with other charts sticking out of pigeon-holes. In one corner was a grey metal box that looked like a giant wireless set.

He watched while the master switched it on and the

warning light glowed red; listened to the explanation of the hammer that beat once a second on the keel, the measuring of the time taken for the echo to return from the sea bottom and the translation of this to depth of water.

The captain turned to the chart. "Look, in the narrows it is marked here NB—No Bottom. They could not reach it with line and lead. Now we will see what our machine says." He turned a knob and the strip of paper started to unwind while a jerking arm stabbed a wavy trace across it. It started to dip, crossing a line marked 500. "Metres," said the master, "over fifteen hundred feet. Now watch."

Through the port-hole they could see the grey wall of cliff closing in as if to squeeze them. As it did so, the pointer increased its fall in great jerks . . . 1,000 . . . 1,500 . . . right off the paper.

The captain smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "Too deep, even for us," he said.

Heskin looked round the stacks of charts. "Do you have every sheet for the whole coast here?"

"But of course: though I am a qualified pilot for all Norway, I still have to use them."

"Can I look at Nordkapp?" Afterwards, he never understood quite why he said it.

The captain reached up to the rack and spread the sheet out on the table. "There you are, Herr Bergman—Europe's most northern land, great Nordkapp, a thousand feet high."

To a landsman it looked as disappointing as all charts: the emphasis, the minute detail of the flat dull sea and the blank disregard of all land except some marks on the

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coast. The master's stubby forefinger ran round the coast line.

"You see, it is on an island. Nordkyn, the other north point is on the mainland, beyond the two fjords. But Nordkapp is the most wonderful sight, Herr Bergman—a great cliff falling straight into the sea."

"Shall we see it?"

"Not on the outward voyage, I'm afraid. We pass through the channel to the south. On our return, yes. But if you really want to see, well, take a small boat from Kjelvik, where we call, and land at Hornvikka where there are steps cut to the top of the cliff. It is a stiff climb, but you fresh on the very edge and the view is wonderful."

Hornvikka . . . He hardly heard anything after that . . . it was as annoying as a single phrase from a forgotten melody . . . he knew he had heard something like it before. "Hornvikka?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes—the bay of the horn. Look." He pulled down the chart until they could see the top margin: there engraved were a row of silhouettes of landmarks as an aid to mariners. One was a great column of rock that sprouted from the cliff-fall like the horn of a rhinoceros.

"A famous landmark—" he pulled the chart back and pointed.—"There. With Hornvikka behind—and Hornsness, the point of the horn, beside it."

Hornsness. Hornets' Nest. Perhaps poor dying Bergman had stumbled over the word, perhaps he himself had misheard. But he had it all now.

Mechanically he pointed to something, anything else on that chart. It happened to be a small black dot on the blank landscape at the tip of the cape.

"What's that?"

The captain laughed. "Another landmark—rather a surprising one to find in such a place. It is a teahouse that was used a lot by the tourists before the war. . . ."

The answer trailed off as he saw the captain's eyes lift towards the door. In the same moment; he was aware of the smell of a cigar. The grey man was leaning against the door jamb, filling its length.

"So we are helping our captain to plot the journey to the far north, Herr Bergman?" It sounded like a joke—would be taken as a joke by anyone—unless they knew.

Late that night they came out of the last confine of cliff and into open water. Ahead lay the long low island, birch covered and dotted with houses. Tromsø.

For once Marianne and he were alone on the boat deck. "What now?" he said, for the hundredth time.

"I don't know. But there must—there's got to be a way."

From the angle of the fjord behind Tromsø Island something else was coming into view. A shape that reared its long round bulk from the water, glowing a dirty red in the horizontal rays of the midnight sun.

"What's that, Marianne?"

She gave him that sideways contemptuous look and did not answer.

"What's that?" he repeated, pointing.

The words dropped one by one, cold measured and in triumph.

"The *Tirpitz*, Erik; bottom upwards, as she was capsized by the British bombers. That was the greatest day in the war for us here. . . ."

From behind them came a wave of cigar smoke and then the harsh voice picked up the thread of their conver-

sation as if he had been present all the time. As always, he had come up without sound.

" . . . Great for you, Fru Bergman—but not for the unfortunates trapped in her. They tell me they tried to get them out by cutting holes in the bottom, but the burners were not strong enough to cut through the armour plate. It was three days before the knocking stopped from inside the hull."

He leant on the rail, sombre, staring out towards the rusting hulk as he tossed a silver coin from hand to hand. In the shadow of the side of his face towards them, the 'T' line of nose and brow seemed gashed out of stone. Heskin thought again of those blind idols staring out for ever over the Pacific.

There was fire in Marianne's voice as she answered.

"It was our greatest day. Though it was forbidden, we ran up the Norwegian flag everywhere on the island. And the Germans did nothing about it."

"A different point of view," said Grästein slowly. Over and over went the silver disc from one hand to the other. Suddenly he caught it and held it out to Heskin.

"What do you think of that, my friend?"

By the size, the king's head and the coat of arms, he knew it was Swedish.

"A Swedish crown."

The grey man took it back and spun it up in the air. "As you observe, a crown. But counterfeit, worthless. Did you not feel the weight? I showed you this because there is a moral to its story. And I am fond of morals. A friend of mine made thousands of these and they are perfect—except for the metal. But now he is in prison for passing them. Let us examine why—what went wrong."

Heskin watched the shining course of the silver crown. He did not look at Marianne.

"He had no market, Herr Bergman. He had the skill to make them but neither the machinery nor the experience for their placing. He should have got an agent—" once more the smile slanted across the shadowed face—"myself—or you, perhaps, but someone who would have taken care of that side of the enterprise for a reasonable commission. But he was greedy. He wanted it all for himself. He went round Stockholm with a suitcase full changing them anywhere. Now he is in jail. Do you wonder?"

"No," said Heskin.

"But you, my friend, if you had something precious—and dangerous—that needed disposal, you would be sensible enough to avoid my friend's mistake?"

Heskin was deep in it now.

"If I thought you—I mean, the agent—had a better chance of disposal, and the commission was reasonable—I think I would."

"And your idea of reasonable—?"

"The normal ten per cent."

The grey man laughed. "Then I fear you and I should not do business. In a venture like that, the expenses, the risks, are so great. Fifty per cent would be the figure before I was tempted to act for you." He sighed and put the coin back in his pocket. "But of course, as I have told, you before, I always prefer to buy outright. And keep the profit—and risk—to myself."

He broke off, and for the first time looked straight at Marianne.

"Two whole days in Tromsø," he said. "Do you plan to go ashore?"

No."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Fru Bergman. A little island with little to do. I often wonder who first called it the Paris of the north. But the professor was talking to me—he suggested arranging an excursion by car on the mainland. I believe there is some beautiful country. Has he mentioned it to you?"

"Yes. But I don't think we will go."

Heskin stared at her. It was the first he had heard of it.

"You see, it would be expensive—with two cars," said Marianne, "and we would have to take two—with us, the professor and his wife, and the three of you."

Grästein shook his head. "My friends will not come—they have other business. And I understand that the Fru Professor has friends to visit on Tromsø—it will be just the four of us. One car will be enough."

"Well, I'm still not sure if we can manage it. Perhaps we can let you know later."

The wharfs and jetties of the port were sliding close to their port quarter. Behind them, the tiers of wooden houses ran down the slope to press the warehouses forward into the water, their pointed sloping gables looked like pricked ears.

"It's very late—and I'm tired. Shall we go below, Erik? Goodnight, Herr Grästein." With an abrupt movement, Marianne turned from the rail and led the way down the companion way.

In the cabin, as they were undressing, Heskin said. "Why not go?"

"Haven't the English a song about the spider and the fly? It's very lonely out there. And he is very determined. He might start anything."

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"What about the professor," he said, "—he'll be there."

She looked at him. "What do you know about the professor?"

"Only that he is a nice little man—and was in the Resistance. He says he heard of you then."

She slipped her frock over her head. "Well, I never heard of him. And there were lots of nice little men in the Resistance—some of them might not be so nice now."

"Apart from that—I still think he wants to do a deal peaceably. He was hinting at it hard enough on deck."

"Perhaps. But it's not worth the risk. You'll have to acquire a headache, or fever, or something—to serve as an excuse for having to stay below decks."

He stared at her. "Stay below deck? What on earth for? I want to have a look at the island, even if we can't take the drive. Tromsø looks interesting."

"You're crazy!"

She stood quite still, her slip hanging half-way down her arms. For the first time he saw a look of uncertainty, a bewilderment come into her eyes. Then she flushed and her voice went hard.

"You go into Tromsø? Has your conceit—or the greed—gone to your head? I have been thinking about the third man," she mimicked—"you admit you know. Then how long do you think you would last on the streets of Tromsø without being recognised—and what would happen after that—?"

She went on with her undressing. "I still have need of you: that is the only reason I care." There was the sharp hiss of the curtain being drawn across the port-hole and then the cabin was green, translucent, like the depths of the ocean.

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"I thought you were a coward," she said, "I did not think you would have the spirit to attempt that." There was the creak of her bunk as she climbed in.

After he had done the same he lay for a long time staring at the deckhead, listening to the ringing of the telegraph and the changing beat of the *Mercur*'s engines as she was brought into the quay. There was the soft shock of the ship coming to rest and then the creak of the timbers of the jetty as they took up the strain.

Tromsø was out there: the broad quay, then the narrow twisting streets and the wooden houses rising up the hill. He wanted to get up and shout at Marianne, shake her into the conviction that there was no reason why he should not walk those streets for the first time in his life without harm. But deep down he knew—her anxiety that he should not go only made it more certain—that what she believed was right. Something terrible would be waiting for him there.

## VIII

IN the morning she went early to the stewardess and breakfast was sent down on a tray to the cabin. When they had finished, she tidied his bunk and propped the pillows up behind him.

"There," she said, "you look like an invalid. You have a feverish cold, by the way." She went to the door and took her coat from the hook. "I have to go into the town. I won't be long. Don't move from here—please, promise me."

Her urgency brought back a stab of fear from the night before.

"All right. But I think it's quite unnecessary."

"I don't."

He picked up a book, but there were too many other things to let him concentrate. The sight of the slow rise and fall of the wharf timbers framed in the square of the open port, the suck of the tide against the piles, the salt smell of seaweed. But always, weaving through the pattern of these, was the fear and uncertainty of the night before.

There was something else, too: a sound that irritated. A faint regular scrape that sounded like metal on glass. But he was too lazy to bother to investigate.

An hour passed. Then there was a knock on the door. He picked up his book; probably the stewardess coming for the tray.

"Come in." The door opened and closed softly. He looked up from the page to see Grästein standing there, holding a small battered suitcase.

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"Ah, Herr Bergman. I was sorry to hear you were ill. I suppose it will cancel our trip—a pity, as I had thought it would be a good opportunity to talk to you. So I take the liberty of coming to see you here. But your wife—"

"She's gone into the town."

"Will she be long?"

"I don't think so."

"Then I will wait."

Without invitation, he moved some clothes from the back of a chair and sat down, balancing the case on his knees.

"Perhaps," he said, "it might be better if we were to talk of this alone."

Heskin stared at him. "If there is anything to discuss, it will have to be in front of my wife."

"I see." There was silence but for the dull tattoo of the fingers strumming on top of the case.

It was a relief when the door jerked open and Marianne came in. "That man Gleb," she said, "I'll—" Then she saw Grästein.

"Herr Grästein wants to talk to us, Marianne." He looked hard at her. "I would not discuss *anything* until you got back."

Grästein had not risen. Marianne brushed by to turn and lean against the edge of the dressing-table.

"So you want to talk to us, Herr Grästein? Good. But before you do, I want to say something. That friend of yours, Gleb. He is lying on the boat deck in a sleeping-bag, right over the gangway to this cabin. He would not move to let me by. I had to step right over him. Will you speak to him about it—or shall I see the captain?"

There was that bleak smile. "I apologise, Fru Bergman.

I will speak. He is hardy—likes sleeping outside. He does not understand.”

“Thank you. Now we are listening.”

He stirred in his chair. “Let us cut all this pretence and come to business. I am a business man. I know what you have and I want to buy it. But—”

“What exactly is it we have?”

There was a pained look on his face as he turned to the questioner.

“Fru Bergman—you *know* I know. But, if you insist on details—the knowledge of the location of—”, the big hands spread out in a gesture of the bazaar—“written treachery—between nations. And—you may not even know this—some scientific data that might shorten certain investigations by two years. The Germans had got further than fooling around with heavy water at Rjukan.”

There was a long silence. Marianne had turned to the mirror and was powdering her nose; then she opened one of the small drawers of the dressing-table, feeling in it as if for lipstick or handkerchief. Heskin, hunched up in the bunk, was thinking. ‘That was the place where the Commandos made a raid on an atomic plant. So there’s that as well. But Marianne never mentioned it.’

The harsh voice cut in again. “I am telling you this—so you will understand the thing is too big—you cannot handle it. But I can. So—”

There was a click as his fingers slipped the catches of the suitcase.

Marianne’s hand came out of the drawer and she whipped round. The Colt .32—the one he had seen once before in the moonlight—was small but very steady in it as it levelled on their guest.

"Stop that. You, Grästein, put your hands up. Above your head. Erik, tip that case on the floor. There's a gun inside."

The grey man hardly moved. He did not raise his hands but let them fall limp to his sides. As Heskin scrambled from the bunk, he said, "I come to buy. There is no gun."

"Tip it over, Erik."

There wasn't the heavy thud of a weapon hitting the ground: only the softer sound of packet after packet of ochre kroner notes falling to the carpet.

"You see," said Grästein, "if you think about it—there could be no gun. My only interest in you both is alive and talking. And you, Fru Bergman, please put that down. There might be an accident—and then the police would come. You know you would not like that."

There was a faint sound as Marianne put the gun on the table beside her. "Well——?" she said

"That's better." The grey man leant forward and picked up one of the bundles. He held it between the claw of finger and thumb. "There is here"—his eyes flicked for a second to the notes—"two thousand kroner. On the floor you will find twenty-nine similar packets. It is all good money—verify that if you wish. A total of sixty thousand."

He was on his knees now, righting the suitcase and dropping the packets back in it one by one as if to emphasise the next words.

"My proposition is this. That I give you this case now. That one of you come with me—alone—to the place. That, when I have examined . . . what is there, I give you a further, equal sum. Then we have a drink, shake hands,

and go our own separate ways. Like all business, it is really very simple."

For a long time no one answered. Then Marianne's tight voice cut across the cabin. "A hundred and twenty thousand—? We want more than that, Grästein."

He spread his hands out again. "I should explain. I am not an agent in this matter—offering other people money. I am the principal—and until I have completed the deal with my other customer, my resources are limited. This is the most I can manage."

"Who is the other customer?"

Again that smile. "The disclosure, Fru Bergman, would hardly be ethical."

For the first time she turned to look at Heskin. "What do you think—?"

"That we should have time—to consider."

The grey man stood up. "That is reasonable." He picked up his case and walked to the door, then turned to face them.

"I understand the ship sails tomorrow at nine. I must know before that. I will come here for your answer at seven. Until then, I will see you are left in peace—unless, of course, you have any stupid ideas. I hope you will accept my offer; because, if not—"

"If not—?" Marianne said softly.

"It will be war."

As he lingered over the words, his free hand came up as if to straighten his tie. Then it was so quick, there was just a blur of movement before the big Lüger was rock-steady, pointing at them. He stood like that, smiling gently for a moment, before he slid the gun back into its shoulder holster.

"—And if it is war, Fru Bergman, I should advise you to avoid gun-play." There was a quick bow. "Until seven tomorrow," he said. The door closed gently behind him.

Marianne slid the Colt into the drawer and closed it.

"Well——?"

"Six thousand pounds—it's a lot of money."

"Pounds—if you prefer to think that way—or kroner, it is not enough. If he offers that, what do you think—really—they are worth?"

"You mean to go on then?"

"Of course. Unless he thinks in very different terms. But I want these papers—for myself, now."

"But, how can we get away?"

"I don't know—yet." She considered. "So we have until seven. Perhaps it would not be a bad thing to go—"

"To go where?"

She turned to him. "On a trip on the mainland. I've been thinking—it's not really fair to keep you cooped up here. But, if I do agree, you must promise you won't try to land on the island."

"Anything to get out of this," he said.

She went on as if she had not noticed this, almost to herself.

"It should be safe—there aren't many people about over there—the only chance is at the ferry, but we could take a launch, I suppose——"

She was so careful to work out how no one should see him that it made him even more afraid.

"All right," she finished, "we'll chance it. I'll go and tell the professor you are better! I expect he can still fix it."

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At the door, she hesitated. "Only remember, when we land on the ferry pier on the other side—try and not make yourself—too noticeable."

They were an ill-assorted quartet that piled into the open car that was waiting for them at the end of the quay. The grey man—Heskin never knew if he had just heard, or been invited—climbed in the front with the driver. He was still holding that battered suitcase. The professor, lugging a lunch hamper, waving his free arm, voluble, excited, piled in the back between Heskin and Marianne. She had been nervous, he could see that, when they had landed from the launch on the quay. There had been quick searching glances when they had passed a group of loungers and come face to face with their driver. But no one had started or stared.

They set off at an easy pace along the white ribbon of road that twisted in and out of the narrow belt of cultivation on the valley floor. There were patches of potatoes, the green thrusting up almost visibly to drink in the power of continuous daylight: the hay-fields, with the first crop still drying in long brown rows while the second crop was already ankle high. Between, the tracery of birch grove, black and silver and green froth of bursting bud. Always on the flank the mountains marched, snow streaked, chequered by running cloud, withdrawn and inviolate.

The talk, in English, flowed over Heskin. He stared at the broad grey shoulder that showed over the seat in front and then to either side of the car. From one flank he was continually nudged by the jerking arm of the professor as he waved and pointed at every point of interest that came in sight. The stream of information that flowed across him was only broken occasionally by

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Marianne's low answers. In the front the grey man was silent, frozen.

When they came to the first cross-roads, Marianne said, "May I direct the driver, professor. There is a place I would like to visit." From then on, she would lean forward at each junction, giving soft directions. The country was getting wilder now: the mountains were closing in and the cultivation hesitated, then was lost in a wilderness of boulder and scrub. The professor's stream of talk died in spasms, the bobble of his little cap no longer jerked up and down with the excitement.

They came at last to the head of a long narrow fjord, with the road slanting down one side towards the water's edge. All before had been beautiful, but here was something to give fresh wonder.

Everything was on a larger scale: the mountains, black and jagged, seemed to hang right over the water that was so still it seemed to be a strip of polished metal. The reflection in it of the clouds and far shore hung steady, unblemished by a ripple. There were no farms, no cultivation: only the dark sweep of larch running down to the water and the mosaic of snow patches on the grass at the side of the road. The sun shone and it was warm, but over everything there seemed to hang a dark shadow that sapped the last drain of life from the sombre browns and greys.

"Lyngs fjord, Erik," said Marianne suddenly. Then she turned back to the professor. "You, of course, remember. It was here that the Germans built those fortifications against attack from the east—the Lyngen Line, with the work done by Russian prisoners of war."

The little man's eyes were unhappy. "Oh, yes—I

heard of it. Terrible stories. But I never thought that

"Oh, I don't know, professor; sometimes, it is good to remember these things——" She was searching the side of the road, looking for something. Then she bent forward to the driver and the car stopped.

On the side of the road that ran down to the water, the nave of larch thinned out and then drew back. In their place was a long man-made clearing. It had been some sort of a camp; through the tangle of weed and sapling, long low humps of hut foundations showed, everywhere there were broken piles of rubble, timber and tattered weather-board: under a clump of elder, the brown stain of rusting coils of wire. Everything was sad and untidy and pressed down with that feeling of desolation . . . almost unbearable. . . .

Marianne stood by the side of the road with her hands in her pockets and looked at the three men. She said, "I thought this would be a nice place to have our meal. Get the hamper out, Erik. The driver can go on to the village and get something to eat—and come and pick us up."

Heskin moved a pace off the road to stand beside the grey man. He put the hamper down and turned to watch the careful selection of a cigar that was going on beside him. When Grästein had lit up, he blew out a long thin stream of smoke and then stared around. "How very interesting," he said. Then he turned to look from Heskin to the battered suitcase that stood by his own feet.

"Are you ready—to take this, yet?" The deep grey eyes searched his face through the haze of smoke.

The answer came almost mechanically. "No, we have not decided."

"Ah——" Another stream of smoke came out slowly.  
"A difference of opinion, I expect. But I am sure I know  
who holds the more prudent view——"

Heskin did not bother to answer. He was straining his ears to catch something of the furious low-toned Norwegian argument that was going on a few feet behind. He caught only a few words, all from the professor, and they included "unnecessary, distressing, and bad taste." The little man seemed very upset, Marianne sounded impatient and disdainful.

It stopped abruptly and then she was beside him, pointing down into the clearing. "It looks a good place—down there. Will you bring the case?" They trooped down after her, the professor tight-lipped, with a bright red spot burning on each cheek. Behind them there was the sound of the car starting and then it died away down the road. The silence closed in from the dark trees.

They found a little open space, and Heskin and the professor laid out the picnic meal without speaking. The grey man had lowered himself to a boulder, the suitcase wedged between his feet, watching them: Marianne was wandering round, poking at the piles of rubbish.

They ate and drank. The conversation went between them in spasms, hushed, short and trivial. There was only one thing that could be talked about here—the thing that was hanging over them: and all knew it could not be mentioned. The sun was shining, it was warm, but no birds sang in the dark woods: once sound came as a gust of wind rippled across the clearing, making the loose boards flap and a trail of yellowing paper scurry over the grass.

## HORNETS' NEST

Marianne looked at him. "Can you feel it?" she said suddenly.

He did not bother to say "What?"; he just stared at the ground while her voice went on, knowing well what "it" was and that she was only talking to him.

"Have you ever wondered, professor, why they always built these concentration camps in the most beautiful parts of our country? Was it because they are the loneliest—few outsiders to see and hear what went on? Or a form of refined sadism?"

"I prefer not to think about it, Fru Bergman." The professor's voice was stiff.

"This was one of the biggest camps, Erik," she went on casually, "there were a few Norwegian hostages, but the bulk were Russian prisoners working on the Lyngen Line. The Germans worked them to death—and gave the living so little food that they started to eat their own dead—"

There was a sharp sound as the professor jumped to his feet. His face was dead-white and his eyes blazing.

"Fru Bergman! This is intolerable! Why must you inflict these things on us—especially your husband? An Englishman, an ally—what is the object of telling of all the filthy things that happened?"

Marianne looked up at him, very calm.

"Don't you think it a good thing for him to know?"

"I do not. And it will not happen in my presence." He raised his little cap by the bobble in a gesture that would have been funny at any other time. "With your permission, I will go down the road to meet the car. Good afternoon." He turned on his heel and walked up the hill out of the clearing.

Heskin turned his head to one side in an effort to stifle the sour sick feeling rising in his throat. "I think I'll stretch my legs too." He looked back after he had gone a few yards. Marianne was kneeling, packing up the hamper. Grästein was still on his rock, as motionless as one of those stone idols, a haze of cigar smoke snaking round his head, smiling.

There was nothing to see but the rubbish and piles of broken brick and board that stretched on endlessly. Nothing to think about but that one thought. When he turned to go back, he saw that Marianne had separated from the grey man. She was standing, leaning against a post, her back tilted back against it, hands in pockets. He went straight over to her.

"Hello. Did you find the site of your old hut?"

He ignored it—he had to. "Why did you do that?" he said.

She turned her head to look at him. "Don't take any notice of that silly little man; that kind are always too damned sensitive."

"I didn't mean him—I meant to me."

There was a heavy silence. She leant back straight and stiff against the post. Above her head, a broken strand of barbed wire scraped and fretted as the wind caught it.

"To watch your face," she said.

He stared at his feet, turning over some of the débris with the point of his shoe: a rusting steel helmet fell over on its side with a hollow sound. Suddenly, he was very weary of the whole business.

"Grästein's been talking to me," she went on, "asking if we had decided——"

"He had a go at me earlier."

## HORNETS' NEST

"I thought he had—so, if there was any idea of splitting us up behind it, I told him we held half each. He seemed to find it amusing."

"It would be amusing to anyone that we can't trust each other," he said bitterly.

From the direction of the road, the horn of their car cut suddenly across the shadows. It was a silent return journey: the professor had got in the front and did not turn round or speak once. Marianne was wedged between him and the bulk of Grästein. Even after all that had happened, it was a shock to feel the cold hard bulk of the automatic pressing through her side pocket against him.

## IX

THE subject was not mentioned again until after the evening meal. They were in the cabin, the unending, unchanging sunlight slanting through the square open ports, the creak of the wharf and the sound of the capstan loading coming from above. Heskin was lying on his bunk trying to get on with his book, Marianne restless, moving from bunk to dressing-table, picking things up and putting them down. Suddenly she stubbed out her tenth cigarette, and said, "Have you decided what we are going to do?"

He looked at her over the top of the page.

"I thought you had already done that. I don't think I'm frightfully interested, either way. You decide."

She leaned forward. "Then you will tell me?"

"If you decide to deal with Grästein, I will tell him. If you decide to go on, I will help you find it." He went back to his book.

There was a long silence and then she said softly, "Wouldn't it be better if we started to try and be friends, Erik?"

He did not answer.

There was a longer pause before she said, "And an even better idea would be to go to bed now, sleep on it, and wake up early and try and give Grästein the right answer."

He could not sleep. He lay awake for hours listening to her steady breathing, marking the hours as they were

## HORNETS' NEST

rung on the ship's bell. It was just after midnight that he knew he could stand it no longer.

He slipped out of bed, put on his clothes and strapped the money-belt tight round him. With shoes in one hand he crept over to the dressing-table. As he eased open the drawer that held the gun, her voice came from behind him.

"Going for a walk, Erik?"

He turned square to face her. She had propped herself on one elbow and he followed the curve of her breast shadowed beneath the neck of her nightdress with a wave of bitter-sweet tenderness.

"Yes. I'm going—for good. I can't stand it."

She had not moved, but her eyes, dark and withdrawn, were searching his face. She said, "The streets of Tromsø are pretty empty at this time—except for the police. They would have all the more time to look for strangers. I should think you would be spotted even sooner than in the day."

"I'll chance that. I can't go on like this. You know how I feel—about you."

"I think I do. And you must know how I feel."

There was a long silence.

"If you did get away," she said, "what then——?"

"I don't know—except to be free of it all—for ever."

"You'll never be free of it." She stopped and then a match flared and after that nothing for a long time but the glow of her cigarette in the green gloom of the cabin. At last she spoke, very slowly and carefully.

"If—I get you out of here. Will you play square with me?"

"Of course."

"All right." She swung her legs out of the bunk and started dressing in slacks, shirt and sweater. All the time she talked to him in jerking sentences.

"I think I can fix it—but I'll have to go on first and prepare a way. I don't know how long I will be—at least an hour. Just get together essentials you can carry while you're waiting. We'll have to leave the rest." Then she looked at the money belt. "How much is there left?"

"About eight thousand kroner."

She shrugged. "It will have to do." Then she gave a last tug at her sweater and pushed back her hair. "Now I'm going. Watch out for me as I come back."

"But how will you manage it—I mean Grästein and his friends —there's always one on watch."

"Had you thought of that one—when you decided to make your exit, Erik? No, there are more ways out of this ship than down the gangway. Give me a hand up."

She knelt on his bunk and very softly pulled the curtain back from the port. Outside the piles of the jetty were only two feet away, heaving gently on the swell.

"I'm going out feet first," she said, "steady me under the arms until I get a foot-hold."

The port was square, almost like a window and there was plenty of room for her to wriggle out and turn over to face him. As he took the strain, he could feel the warmth of her arms through the shirt and her hair was very close to his face.

She gave a grunt. "Got it." For a moment she stayed framed in the square of the port.

"I won't be too long."

"Where are we going?"

"To friends."

## HORNETS' NEST

Then, for the first time, she touched him deliberately: she slipped one hand from the sill of the port and caught his in a quick squeeze. Swinging backwards, she caught hold of one of the upright piles and vanished back into the darkness, jerking silent as a bat as she jumped from cross-brace to cross-brace.

When he had done the sorting, he sat on the bunk waiting for her return. There was so little that was necessary, it was all stowed in one small rucksack. Once or twice he looked round the small space that had for so long been their intimate, uneasy, home. But most of the time he watched the jungle of piles, lit by gleams from the water below, waiting for her return. Once or twice the noise that he had heard the night before came back: it happened with each slight roll of the ship, a tiny scraping sound. He looked out of the port, in each direction down the plates of the hull to the narrow strip of water, but could not see anything.

Marianne came back out of the darkness like some darting will-o-the-wisp. She stopped well within the shadow and beckoned. He tightened the straps of the haversack, then wriggled through the porthole feet first, turning round to face the plates of the hull and scraping down them as he took his weight on his arms. A hand came out from behind and caught his ankle, guiding it back to rest on the timber. A heave on the back of his coat and he was standing beside her.

"Come on," she breathed.

The jetty seemed to have been repaired and extended so much that there was hardly a place where they could not move level on the supporting timbers. Half-dark, with the cracks of light that came through the upper planking

## HORNETS' NEST

reflected in flashes on the dark sucking water below; it was cool, salty, with the tang of seaweed. Their feet rasped on barnacles. Once they stopped at the hollow drum of feet that came from over their heads: when it had died away, he whispered, "How did you know this way?"

She answered as softly, "We learnt in the Occupation. The Germans used to store their rations here. We came in underneath in the dark and cut up through the planking under the stacks of flour and sugar. Then we used to suck the contents out of the bottom sacks. It meant shooting if we were caught—but we were starving."

As they moved on he could hear a new sound, the sharp hiss of the edge of the sea running up a beach. Then, to the side, there was the reflection of light from the planking of small boats moored in a basin.

Marianne stopped again. "Give me two hundred kroner. There will be a boat waiting directly opposite where we come out. Get in quick and lie in the bottom. And—try not to let the man have too good a look at your face."

A white launch was there with a tall bald man in dungarees sitting in the stern, smoking a pipe. He did not look in their direction when she whistled, but bent and started to crank the engine. In seconds they had scrambled over the two boats moored between and dived for the bottom boards of the launch. Lying there, Heskin felt the throb of the motor quicken.

No one spoke until the boat started to heel as she turned to starboard; then Marianne looked back and asked a question he could not hear. The man at the tiller gave a searching look behind him before answering in a monosyllable.

## HORNETS' NEST

"You can sit up," said Marianne, "there's no one watching on the *Mercur*."

They were moving fast to the south over the long swells outside the jetties. To landward, the ramble of the town backed on to the low hump of the island. Then the bows turned in towards a pier and the man at the helm cut his engine. As he passed Marianne on his way to the bows to fend off, the wad of notes changed hands in silence.

When they touched the pier-head, he jumped ashore, giving a kick with one leg to push the bows out. Then he walked away without once looking back.

"And what does he think we are doing?"

The note of the engine had picked up and they were heading out to the open fjord.

Marianne leant back on the tiller. "Eloping. And in Tromsø they are romantic—and mind their own business."

The town thinned out to nothing on their beam: the island dwindled to a low strip of land clumped with stunted birch and then there was the sweep of open water with the hulk of the *Tirpitz* showing far off as a dirty brown stain against the backcloth of the mountains. The bows swung round and pointed directly towards it.

They moved on steadily and the red bulk had doubled in size before he realised the purpose of their course.

"What on earth are we going there for. I thought you said something about friends."

"We are—but we can't arrive in the middle of the night. They're a funny suspicious lot. We have a good deal of time to waste."

"Why waste it at a wreck?" Now that the strain of escape had passed, he felt nothing but a vague irritation. There were the beginnings of a headache too.

## HORNETS' NEST

"Because I have never been—and always wanted to go. Because it is the last place they would think of looking for us."

The sun was away behind the far mountains on its circle of the horizon before the rise to another day. There was a steady cold breeze blowing towards them and he shivered as he pulled his jacket close. The sea was jagged but silky, reflecting in its blackness the orange flecks of the northern glow.

As they ran close to circle the capsized ship, he saw for the first time how vast she was. Seven hundred feet must be the run of the keel from knife bows through barrel midships to the tapering stern where the propellerless tail shafts stuck out like guns. Tilted to one side, streaked and stained, an oily murk tingeing the water that sucked and sighed from her bowels, there was no triumph in the sight. . . . only sadness. It was the rotting carcass of a once-proud animal.

They moored to the flat pontoon that was against the far side. Marianne picked up a sack that had been lying on the bottom boards of their launch.

"This was the best they could do at short notice. But I think there will be most things we want. Come on."

He looked up the smooth steep slope with the zig-zag pattern of holes, each large enough to take a boot, that were cut through the plating one above the other. They ended in a square black hole some thirty feet above. He could see the jagged edges of it, the lumps of run metal where the acetylene cutters had made their desperate fight to pierce the hull.

"You're not going inside there?"

## HORNETS' NEST

She looked up from untying the sack. "Of course. Why not?"

"But what's the point, Marianne? If we must wait before going on, isn't there some other place?"

"Frightened?"

"No. But it will be cold, smelly, dirty—and I should think dangerous."

She did not answer, but started to hum softly under her breath as she emptied the contents of the sack. She separated two large torches, a ball of string and a length of rope: wound the rope round her waist and tied the swivel of the torch to her belt with some of the string. All the time her song went on. . . . "Der var en skikkelig bondeman . . . Som skulde ut etter øl." Damn her . . . and damn that song.

Then she stooped and held out the other torch. "Tie it on like mine—in case you drop it. You go first."

It was an easy climb to the large hole. He peered into the blackness of it while the smell of fuel oil fanned out from within. Then he looked down at her, waiting a few footholds below.

"You had better go up on the keel first and see if there is anyone about," she said. "I'll wait here."

As the slope became easier, the footholds stopped. It was like walking up a smooth brown hill until he reached the flat summit of the keel. All round, the pale sea was coming to life as the yellow disc of the sun began its upward climb from behind the shelter of the hills: the waste of water was empty but for the smudge of one fishing boat working round the point of Tromsø island: the cold wind was still blowing off the land.

Escape? . . . he looked all round where the plates went

down into the water. Too steep. Only by the rudder at the stern might it be possible, and then it was the hell of a long swim to shore. He looked at his watch. Half-past three. Perhaps later, inside, he might manage something. He turned and climbed down to where Marianne was waiting.

"All right?" she said.

"Yes."

"You go first, then. And remember everything will be very slippery and upside down."

At the beginning, the tunnel had been cut through the double bottom. It was dry, at least, and the smell of fuel oil not as bad as he expected. They shuffled forward, a foot at a time, their flashlights stabbing the blackness ahead, squeezing through the narrow slits cut in the plating between compartments. Once, through the second skin, there was another gap: the pale fingers of their torches groped into a dark cavern, picking out a tangle of twisted ladder festooned from above: far below, a jumble of round shapes that seemed to be talking as the water slapped and sighed round them.

"The engine-room," he whispered, "—all the turbines and machinery must have fallen out as she turned over."

In spite of himself, he was interested; he pushed on without noticing the change in the air, that over the smell of oil there was something else hanging—sour and musty. Then they came to a dead stop. The wall of plating before the next compartment was smooth and blank, with only a square hole cut in the floor before it. Their lights showed a straight fall, without any foothold, to the next deck.

"That's that," he said. For the first time he was aware of the other thing that was seeping up towards them.

## HORNETS' NEST

But Marianne had started to uncoil the rope from her waist.

"They told me about this. We can lash the rope here and let ourselves down." Then she pulled the ball of string from her pocket. "They said, too, that the way twists and turns below. Tie the end to something when we get down and pay it out as we go. Then we are certain to find our way back."

He looked down doubtfully. "Did they—get them—everything out after it happened?"

She turned from tying the rope.

"Yes. We won't come across any bodies—if that's what you mean."

When they had slid down, they were walking on the ceiling of a passage with steel doors on one side, some open, some jammed shut: the pattern of those they managed to look into was all the same—a tangle of bedding, uniform, and furniture heaped where it had fallen downwards. They edged on past a smooth half-circle of plating like a tank or gasometer—the outside of one of the ammunition hoists to the big turrets, he thought—and then there was another blank wall, another hole in the floor. Now the smell was almost overpowering.

Heskin shone his torch down the rungs of a reversed ladder that slanted away into the black trembling surface of oily water.

"Well, this is it. We don't want to get wet and we haven't any more rope."

Marianne was peering over his shoulder. "We could climb down the back of the ladder. The water can't be very deep."

"I think it's stupid."

## HORNET'S NEST

"Well, I'm going to have a try." She pushed past him.

He was not quite sure how it happened: one moment she was hanging from the rungs of the ladder with her torch alight, then there was the scrape of metal, a smothered cry, followed by a splash and the light went out.

Escape never occurred to him then. As his torch searched round and steadied on her, there was only a feeling of relief. She had been right under, her hair streaked and hanging and her face smudged with oil. But the water was only knee-deep as she leaned against the side wall.

"I told you not to."

She did not answer but made a movement back towards the ladder; above the slosh of the water he heard the sharp hiss of her breath as something black and bloated, that glistened in the torchlight, rolled away from her on the face of the oil.

"It's all right. It's only an old life-jacket." It was difficult to make it sound convincing. "Come over here and I'll haul you up."

She tried another step and then her voice came back for the first time, very small and forlorn.

"I can't. I've twisted my ankle."

He never knew quite how he managed to reach her. Then, the haul up the ladder and back along the way they had come, holding her in front of him, trying to take the weight off the injured foot while she shone his torch and followed the guiding string. It took a long time and he had just said, "I think the best thing to do will be to shin up myself and then haul you up in a sling," when they came to the blank wall with the hole in the roof above.

### HORNETS' NEST

The torch beam moved on up the slanting string to where they had tied it to a ringbolt. Then it circled once, twice, round the black hole above them. But there was no rope hanging down as they had left it.

## X

HE lowered Marianne to the floor and started a frantic unbelieving search to see where it had fallen. Then a white light snapped on from the hole above and that voice started talking to them. There was only the light and Grästein up there as he sat on the end of their rope.

"Good morning to you. And, forgive the removal of your exit. You seemed unwilling to give me the answer you promised, so I had to make sure that I got it."

"We were coming back to tell you." Marianne's voice came up from near the floor.

"Oh, I am sure of that - quite sure. But just in case there was a change in your plans, I followed you. And do you know how I managed that, Fru Bergman?"

There was no answer. The harsh voice went on, mocking from behind the white circle of light.

"We did it by listening. We had a microphone fixed outside your cabin port-hole—hence the annoyance of my colleague Gleb sleeping on the deck, for we had to do something to cover the wires. It was most disappointing, playing back those recordings, Herr Bergman. As one of my friends said—not a word of love. But last night we had our first luck—we heard that you were planning to leave, and we learnt the useful fact that the police might show interest in your husband."

Heskin had switched out his light. "Can't we talk outside," he said. "Let the rope down, Grästein, my wife has wrenched her ankle."

## HORNETS' NEST

The light above turned directly on to him. "So——? The lady has hurt herself? That will make my idea all the more——"

In the darkness beside Heskin there was the moment's flash of pale flame before the magnified crack of the automatic. He threw himself flat as the light above snapped out and then the thunderous succession of shots crashed down on them. The narrow confines spewed noise: the clang of impact, echoes, and the snarl of ricochets. When it died, the voice went on as before but it was no longer mocking.

"I warned you about gun-play, Fru Bergman. That was over your head. Next time, it won't be. Now throw your gun out where I can see it. And yours, Bergman."

"I haven't got one."

There was a sob from the darkness beside him and then a thud on the plating. The light switched on for long enough to find the Colt lying there and went out again.

Heskin whispered, "Are you hurt?"

"No. But that this should happen—now."

There was a laugh from above. "Dashed hopes are always infuriating." Then the voice became brisk. "Now, business. And it had better be in the dark. First, here is a present for you——" something came down beside them with a thud—"it is my case—containing the money—just as before. And my proposition is the same. It is a little before the time limit but I want the answer now."

"No." Marianne almost spat it.

"Then you need more time to reflect."

Heskin tried to keep his voice steady. "What do you mean?"

## HORNETS' NEST

"That I will leave you here—and come back at intervals to see if you have changed your minds. It must be wet and cold down there and, I imagine, odorous. Soon your torch will run out—then only darkness. After that will come hunger and thirst. You will break first, Bergman, but it will happen to your wife in time."

There was a silence and then Heskin said, "You can't do that."

"Can't I? I assure you that no consideration of humanity would stop me. Oh, I see—you were thinking of when they notice your absence?"

The voice became almost apologetic. "I think I have dealt with that. I took the liberty of seeing the captain after you left—and gave him your message. He was so sorry to hear about your wife's poor aunt, so suddenly and seriously ill in Trondheim, and quite understood why you had had to rush off to catch the plane. He thought it very good of me to have offered to deal with your luggage. The staff were delighted with your tips. They will sail on today without giving the matter another thought."

"You've forgotten something else," said Heskin.

"Your boat? Oh no. Soon, when the tide has turned, we will cut it adrift and it will go south down the Sound. Quite a way, I should think. When it is found, when you are missing, the authorities will assume there has been an accident. Now, won't you reconsider. . . .?"

No one answered.

"Then the sooner we start, the sooner we will finish," said Grästein. "I will come back in eight hours. I hope that ankle is not too painful. I must tell you that I am leaving Herr Gleb up here—just in case—and he has explicit orders."

## HORNETS' NEST

They heard the hollow boom of his retreat along the passage in the double bottom.

There was a long space of silence and darkness before Heskin dared switch on the one torch. He let it play on the suitcase and the gun; last on Marianne, struggling with the lace of her shoe. Between trouser and sock, he could see the puffiness spreading up from the ankle.

"Don't," he said, "you'll never get it on again."

"What do we do then? Rot here till that devil comes back to take all we have?"

"Not quite all." He looked towards the suitcase. Somehow, it did not occur to open it and check. He knew the money was there. "No." he went on softly, almost to himself, "there's just one other chance—if I'm lucky. I shall have to go back and take the torch. Do you mind being left in the dark. Do you trust me for half-an-hour?"

"I shall have to." She looked very forlorn, propped there against the wall, injured leg stretched straight out in front of her. He undid the money belt and laid it down. "Security," he said. Then he picked up the torch and started to grope his way back to the stern.

He was making for that great round cylinder that towered up like a gasometer to disappear through the next deck. They had passed it on their way in, and somewhere, at some level there must be an opening into it. If he could find it, one memory of long ago gave hope of a possible chance.

Winding and unwinding the string as he made each attempt, trial and error were at last rewarded. Suddenly, he came on a three-foot gap in the curved plating and

## HORNETS' NEST

when he shone his torch down through this opening, he saw that his theory might be right.

It was like a huge circular well, the inside walls descending smooth and unbroken to where the dark face of the water lay thirty feet below. He turned the light, searching for any foothold to get down, but there was none. If the second assumption was proved correct, he would have to jump. He switched out the light and waited till his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. There was a faint greyness, a luminosity creeping through the water from one side far, far down.

He groped his way back to Marianne.

"Listen, I've got back to the turret bottom—that round thing we passed. I think there is a way out there—and I'll tell you how I know. Have you ever heard of Scapa Flow?"

She shook her head.

"It was the place where the German Fleet scuttled their ships after the First World War. When I was a child I used to go up to stay with an uncle who had a job in a dockyard called Rosyth. I remember those ships being brought in there for breaking up when they had been raised. One particularly--she had capsized—and when she came in, there were only great holes in the deck where the turrets had been. They had been dragged out by their own weight when she had turned over."

She was intent now, listening with chin cupped in hands.  
"So—?"

"The same thing has happened here. There is just a great hole with the sea at the bottom. The turret and all the hoisting gear from the magazine has gone."

"But, how does that help us?"

## HORNETS' NEST

"Wait a minute. Do you remember when we came round the stern, that the deck rails on one side were just showing? The water can't be very deep there. If I can get down into it, I should be able to swim out under, climb on the keel—then back here to pull you out."

She thought for a moment. "What about the one he says he left to watch?"

"I don't think he is there. But if he is—and I get that far—I'll come from the last direction he would expect."

He kicked off his shoes. "You can make a demonstration with one of these every few minutes. Bang on the wall. The sound may carry enough to keep him occupied. It will give you something to do, too."

She was still staring at him.

"How are you going to get down to the water?"

"Jump."

"And if you can't get through—how will you get back?"

He smiled. "I won't. There's no way back. If I don't break my neck hitting something I can't see under the water—and can't find a way through—I shall swim round the bottom of that shaft like a puppy in a bucket till I drown. But I think the first is the real danger. I waited in the dark to test the other, and there is clear light coming through the water from one side."

A hand came up to catch his sleeve. "Stay here, Erik. It's not worth it. We'll have to deal with him."

"No, Marianne. We would be back where we were before. I'd rather finish everything than have that happen."

He tried to sound very business-like. "You've got the money—take my coat, it will hinder me and may keep you warm. And my watch." He knelt down and strapped

## HORNETS' NEST

it on, draping the coat round her shoulders. "Now give me your torch."

"But it's broken," she said, "hadn't you better take the gun?"

"It wouldn't be certain after a swim—I only want some sort of a weapon. Take my torch; there's quite a bit left in the battery and it will keep you company if you're scared."

"But how will you see?"

"I've got the string fixed to the spot where I've got to jump. I can feel my way. And it will be better not to see any further than that."

He was so close to her: he thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. "Listen," he said, "one last thing. If I'm not back in an hour, you'll know you're on your own. Bergman didn't tell me very much—but here it is, all of it. Near Nordcapp there is a bay called Hornvikka—which has a point called Hornsness. 'They' are 'under' that."

He looked at her once more, took a firm grip on the end of the string and then went forward and snapped out the torch. "Save that for when you need it," he said.

The darkness was a comforting cloak to the other thing that had to be done. "I want you to know I love you," he said quietly. It was a clumsy, misplaced kiss, but as he slipped away on his stocking feet, one hand groping ahead while the other ran along the string, a bright light was burning inside him. The cheek that he had brushed so quickly was wet, and she had not moved away.

That journey in the dark was not as difficult as he had imagined: climbing with the aid of matches struck at crucial turns, he arrived at last by the slit in the wall of

## HORNETS' NEST

the turret. He struck one more and threw it out into the well, watching the flame snuff out before it hit the water. Perhaps it was better not to see.

"'Twere well it were done quickly," he said, and his voice rolled back to him. Then he dropped forward into space.

The water was very cold, stung his eyes and tasted horrible. Treading water, he turned round to face the brightest point of that faint light. With a last desperate gulp of air, he put his head down, eyes open, and started a slow steady breast stroke to gain maximum depth . . . five . . . six . . . seven strokes, and the water was changing from grey to green, a dark shadow slid by just over his head! . . . ten . . . eleven . . . twelve: now he was letting a little air go with each effort. Then the mesh of the deck rail—the trap he had feared most—was above and behind. He was shooting up through clear water to sunshine and air.

Slowly, without a ripple, he paddled back to the shelter of the side and then went back along it, hand over hand, until he could crawl on to the hull over the shelf of the stern: a pause in the shadow of the great rudder to get back his breath and untie the broken torch from his waist. Then silent, in his stocking feet, he ran up the side of the keel, below the crest, towards the broad girth amidships.

When he crawled up on hands and knees to the skyline, that side of the seas was as empty as the other. But Gleb was there, sitting beside the entrance to the hull with his back towards Heskin. He was peering down into it; intent and still, like a cat at a mousehole. He did not even start to turn until it was too late.

### HORNETS' NEST

Perched on the edge of the steep slope, thrown off balance as he twisted to reach inside his raincoat, he hadn't a chance when Heskin jumped, torch slashing. Both feet caught him on the side of the chest just as the grip of the automatic appeared from under the coat. The gun flew outwards into the water as he arched over backwards in a low slow turn. The thin screech died as he bounced off the side and fell head first on to the pontoon below.

Heskin landed on his side, sliding and scraping down the plates until one hand caught in a foothold. He hung, looking down at the square of the pontoon with that untidy grey bundle spread-eagled in the middle: wondered, without satisfaction, why their boat was still moored there: remembered that the tide would not have turned yet. Then came the painful climb down for a closer inspection. Gleb had got himself a broken neck.

It took a long time to drag Marianne up through the hole and then along the double bottom and down to the pontoon. It was not only that the ankle was painful and she could hardly walk: something was happening to him. The deadly ache in his legs, the headache, that hazy unreal feeling and the shivering were not the result of his swim. He knew what was coming—and in another hour he would be useless.

The sun was high now, flecking the water with diamonds of light, and the clouds, scattered like balls of cotton-wool, gave promise of another fine day. All round them from Tromsø Island north up the Sound, the wide sweep of water was empty.

At last he had her safely on the pontoon. Every movement needed concentration now and was a painful,

laboured necessity. He tried to support her as they shuffled across to the launch. She did not seem surprised that it was still there and only stopped for a moment to stare down at the still grey form.

"Gleb," she said slowly, "—is he——?"

"Yes."

Then for the first time she noticed him.

"You're shaking, Erik—you must be chilled through. And I've still got your coat. Please take it."

He lowered her into the boat and dropped Grästein's battered suitcase down beside her.

"I'm all right. I must do something about that first." He nodded back towards the centre of the pontoon.

"Yes." She looked up towards the bows. "The anchor, that should be heavy enough. Take my knife and cut it away with the rope. Lash that tight round each ankle and tie both together. Button up his coat—and tie the belt tight. That will stop things floating away." It was so detailed that he wondered how often she had helped to do something of this kind.

He tied the body up, dragged it to the edge, and anchor first, slid the feet over the side. Then he let go his grip under the arms. For a moment it stayed upright, chest-deep, spinning slowly while the head hung to one side, looking up at him enquiringly. Then it had gone in a widening band of ripples and great round bubbles.

He staggered back to her. "There's just this." He held out a hat. "We had better take it with us."

When he got into the boat and tried to crank the engine, it was too much. He let the handle fall on the bottom boards and bowed forward 'on his knees.

"Sorry—can't do it," he whispered.

## HORNETS' NEST

"Erik, what's the matter? You're shaking worse than ever. You're face is all wet—you're sweating."

"How—far—where—we're going?" He had to force the words through chattering teeth.

"Only the second bay to the south. There is a jetty and the farm is just over the hill. *Erik, what is the matter with you?*"

He was lying back now. "In an hour—I shall be a write-off," he said. "I'll try to make it there. Then, for two days—just roll me up in blankets—get quinine—if you can."

"What is it?"

"Malaria—I get these bouts. It started on the Gold Coast in the war."

"Malaria—?" Her eyes were wide.

The deck was heaving round him in dim waves as he lay watching her crawl up to cast off and then struggle to start the engine. With the throb of it beneath him, he closed his eyes. It was so nice not to have to fight any more. Not to care.

It was all confused after that. There were patches of memory that remained between the seas of darkness. The awful climb out of the boat and on to the jetty, and the push that sent the launch drifting away on the tide: the pressed-down flat feeling as he lay on the planking, his head pillow'd on the case, staring at the sky as he listened to the uneven beat of her step as she hobbled away, wondering if she would come back. Then, strange faces peering, talk he could not understand, the feel of blankets—of being carried. . . . After that, only fear: of her leaving him . . . of the police . . . of Grästein. . . .

He came back to the dim light of a small bare room

## HORNETS' NEST

with drawn curtains. He was on a narrow bed, piled high with blankets, so weak that he could hardly raise his head. Beside him, sitting on a stool, was Marianne, watching him. She looked very tired.

He said, "I thought you would have gone."

"No. I wanted to. Only—" She moved uneasily.

"Only what—?"

"You've been here three days," she said, "in the farmhouse. I was so scared. I didn't dare get a doctor. You've been talking—raving—I had to tie you down."

She got up and walked over to the window. "You talked about everything—over and over again. But there was not a word more than you have said before—except things about me—that made me ashamed. If there had been one flaw—one lie, I would have gone. There wasn't."

"Then—you believe me—?"

She did not turn round. "I don't know. I want to."

There was a silence while she pulled back a corner of the curtain and peered out. "I'm sorry about this dark," she said, "but I didn't want anyone to see you too well."

So it was coming back again. "I don't mind—the light would only hurt my eyes."

"How do you feel?" she said.

"All right now—but terribly weak—it's just a matter of time."

She had another look through the curtain. "There may be no time—there's a sea mist coming in now. It may be our only chance." She turned towards him. "Look—I'm sorry, but I must talk now. There isn't any option. These people here, they think they know who you are—and they do not like it. So far, I have been able to bribe

### HORNETS' NEST

them, but now other things have happened, and they will not let us stay. Grästein has been here."

He tried to sit up. "Here—to the farm?"

"No. But to the island—enquiring about a missing friend. And after him came the police, because, I think, Grästein had been talking to them of us—and his friend. I saw them, and said that all the time we were on the *Tirpitz* we did not see a soul. But they do not seem quite satisfied. They want a statement from you when you are well."

He tried to speak, but she held up her hand. "Let me finish. Now these people here are really scared. And I have played on their fear and their greed—I have hired their fishing boat, with one of the sons to pilot it, to take us from here to the North Cape. But we must go soon. This mist will give the only cover when there is no night. And you cannot move."

He said, "I shall be fine in two days. But now—I couldn't walk a step to that boat."

She gave him one of those bitter smiles. "I'm sure the farmer would be delighted to carry you off his land."

After a bowl of broth, he felt better and then Marianne helped him dress and held him while he tried a few futile steps across the room. Then the farmer and his son came, standing in the doorway staring, their eyes full of an old sour hate. All the time the thin feelers of mist snaked closer and closer round the house.

When they had gone, she knelt and pulled Grästein's suitcase from beneath the bed. "It's all there—intact—I just counted to make sure. And your money-belt, but I had to use some of that. I think I had better keep the gun."

As he strapped on the belt, he said, "You could have gone."

"I know. But—

There was an uncomfortable pause. "At the North Cape," he said, "what happens? What do they think we are doing there?"

"Something slimy in the black market, I imagine. Let them think what they like. But they have agreed to take us to Kjelvik, the nearest port. After that, we will try to get another boat."

"And if we can't?"

She looked at the rucksack standing in the corner. "I have collected a few things in that. One that will make Olaf—the son that is taking us—go wherever we want."

The mist thickened and turned to a drizzle. When they were ready, the farmer and his son came in again, not speaking, eyes looking straight through him. The younger man hoisted him on to his back as if he had been a baby and they passed in procession out of the house into the writhing bank of mist and rain past the womenfolk drawn up at the door stiff, silent, with that same hostile look, staring in the same uncomfortable way. They moved in line across the potato patch, the farmer leading, then Marianne, foot bandaged, still limping, carrying rucksack and suitcase, last the son with his burden.

They went in single file over the crest of the hill and down the long slope to the jetty. The rain was driving now, thick sweeping clouds of it, cutting visibility to a few yards. Heskin heard the chug of the idling diesel engine long before the shape of the boat loomed up. Then she was beside them, fended off from the end of the jetty by a tall, fair boy. There was thirty foot of the *Fredheim*, with sloping counter, two masts, and the sentry-box wheel-

## HORNETS' NEST

house and outsize yellow funnel to the stern: the pattern of thousands in the fishing ports of the north.

The column halted and Heskin was lowered to the deck. Marianne stood above him facing the farmer as she felt in her pocket and then pulled out a bundle of notes.

She looked down. "The arrangement is an equal sum when we are delivered to Kjelvik, Erik. I think this gentleman would like that confirmed. From what he knows, he cannot believe that you do not speak Norwegian. He has a little English—so please tell him."

He looked up at the flint eyes and the bald crown glistening in the rain. "Olaf,"—he pointed, "more"—he pointed again at the money, "at Kjelvik."

The farmer's eyes snapped and his fist closed over the money. Then he nodded to his son. When Marianne had jumped down, the boy pushed off and ran back to the wheelhouse. As the note of the engine increased and the bows swung out, Heskin watched the two men walk up the jetty until the rain hid them. They did not once look back.

He turned his head aft, staring at the curving circle of their wake. "We're going south," he said.

"Yes. To the next westward channel, and then north in the open sea. It's safer there." She looked down at him. "I must get you below out of this. Or you'll have another attack."

"Yes." He was watching the way she was twisting her wedding ring round and round on her finger. Suddenly he wondered who it had belonged to before—her mother perhaps. For it was not new: several times he had noticed that it was worn quite smooth:

## XI

THERE was a cabin of sorts and Marianne lowered him down the steep ladder into it. Cramped and dark, with two narrow bunks running down each side of the table, a lamp in gimbals bolted forward between the lockers, the whole smelt of paraffin, rats and cheese.

"Take the gun," she said, "I must go up on deck for a minute."

He was very tired: cold and wet and not feeling too good. He took off his coat and rolled up in the blankets that were piled on the bunk. It was warmer then, but hard, and the bulk of the automatic uncomfortable in his hip pocket. He took it out and pushed it far back under the mattress. Then he relaxed waiting for her to come.

It was getting darker—the rain clouds, he supposed. The lamp should be lit but he was too tired to move. The uneven pound of the diesel reached through every part of the hull, making the woodwork of the cabin whisper in protest and the crockery and water jugs stowed in the racks above the bunks jump and rattle as if they were alive.

When she came, she was carrying a steaming coffee pot. She put it on the table and went over to light the bulk-head lamp: as the yellow flame grew, her hair shone, spangled with pearls of raindrops.

"Tired?"

"No, not really—more cold than anything."

"I've brought you some coffee."

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She reached up to take two mugs from their hooks and then he was propped up sipping the dark bitter brew. Marianne leant back against the table cupping her mug in both hands. "I've had a long talk to young Olaf," she said, "—really, I'm rather sorry for him. He's scared of us—and what we might land him in—but much more scared of Papa. But now, I think we understand each other."

"How long will it take us to reach Kjelvik?"

"Two days and a night."

"What do we do—take over when he wants to sleep?"

"No. He says he will run into shelter and anchor for his rest. It doesn't really matter—only make it a bit longer. But I think we'll have to keep an eye on him. Take alternate watches later on."

She put down her mug. "Now I want to show you my part—what was on the map." She hesitated—"You see, in the beginning, when you told me that you carried your part in your head—I did the same. I memorised the map and burnt it."

"Not now," he said.

An expression crossed her face like a ripple on water. It was there and gone so fast he could not be sure of its meaning. It might have been tenderness.

"You're tired."

"I told you—only cold."

She went up the ladder to the deck for a moment and when she came back she closed the hatch after her. The light of the bulkhead lamp shrank to a thin blue line as she turned it down. "We're through the channel and turning north," she said. "We'll leave him alone for a few hours, I don't think there will be any trouble."

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She came towards him through the gloom and touched one of his hands lying on top of the blanket. "But you're frozen. Wait a minute."

He watched while she spread more blankets over him and then sat on the edge of the bunk.

"Move over," she whispered.

The covering was stiff and harsh and the cabin still smelt of paraffin and cheese; but she was close beside him and he could feel the warmth flowing between them. "Give me your hands," she said.

Her skin was very soft and smooth where she pushed them under her shirt against her breast: the rattle and thump of the engine faded to a lullaby. He thought for a moment of the world outside, of their little ship running through the rain squalls into the waste of the Arctic sea. But there was nothing, really, except the pinpoint of the warm cabin. As he drifted off on the dark tide that heaved in rhythm to the rise and fall of the ship, he knew that there was nothing more to want.

He woke to sunshine and silence.

His watch had stopped and the blankets had been tucked into the empty space beside him. He found his coat and shoes: shaky, but rested, he climbed up the ladder to the deck.

The ship was anchored in a little rocky bay, riding easily on the short grey seas that were dashing against the cliff. Marianne was sitting on the deck, her back against the wheelhouse, writing something on a sheet of paper. There was no sign of Olaf.

She smiled at him. "Better?"

"Yes—much. How long have you been up here?"

## HORNETS' NEST

"Quite a time. I heard the engines stop and came up to see why. It was just that Olaf had decided to sleep."

He looked round. "Where is he?"

"In the fish-hold. And we're all right here. There can't be a house within miles."

The cliff was steep and grey and covered with thin patches of coarse grass: to seaward, there was nothing but the pearl-grey rim of the horizon. The sky was overcast. Everything a monotony of sadness.

"There's some coffee in the galley," said Marianne, "and some bread and tinned fish. Bring them up here. Afterwards, I want to talk to you."

He stood looking down at her before he turned to go.

"Last night—down there. Did it mean that you really believe me?"

She was bending so that he could not see her face, twisting that wedding ring round and round on her finger. Her voice was very low.

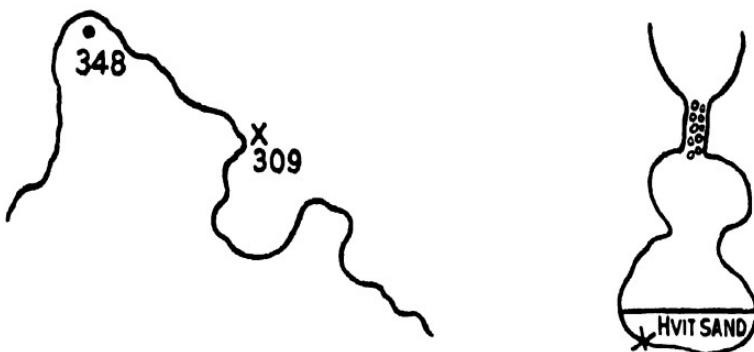
"I don't know, Erik. But I want to—truly, I want to."

The coffee was just as bitter, the bread black and the herring hard and salt, but they put new life into him. When they had finished, she stretched out on the deck, spreading the paper in front of her. "Look. I've drawn it so many times that I know I have got it just as it was."

It was no more than a diagram drawn in two halves. The first part was a waving, humped line that might have been the silhouette of a mountain but for the sharp semi-circular indent half-way down the right hand edge: near the summit was a single dot with the figure 348 against it: further down, just above the indent, a cross with another set of numbers. 309. That was all.



The second section looked like an hour-glass with a thin pipe leading out of the top which expanded into a funnel. The narrow part seemed to be filled with a plug made of small round circles: across the bottom of the hour-glass was a line like a level of fluid. On this two Norwegian words and another cross.



Marianne said, "Even now you have told me where—it still is nonsense. If only Lars had put in one clue—" She stopped suddenly.

He had hardly heard: he was looking round her elbow, staring at the drawing.

"I think we are a bit farther on. I've seen a chart of the North Cape, and that—" he pointed to the left—"is very like the shape of the coast. Then that dot must be the tea-house on the cliff: that cut to the side, the bay of the horn."

"And the cross?"

"I don't know—probably the horn itself."

"The figures?"

"Unless it is an extraordinary coincidence, they must be bearings," he said slowly, "—it's the only thing possible.

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You must have to come in from the south-east, make the tea-house bear  $309^\circ$ . And when the other thing—whatever it is—hears  $348^\circ$ , you're there."

He looked at her curiously. "But I don't understand—if I were Bergman—if what you told me was true—why should I have bothered to contact you at all. Bergman was the third man, wasn't he?—He went with the others to hide the stuff. He could surely have gone back now and collected it alone."

She turned sideways, propping herself on one elbow, giving him a long searching look. It was as if she was peeling off layer after layer of pretence from the kernel of his secret thoughts.

"As I am trying so hard to believe you, I will say why. I was told Bergman never got there."

"But you said——"

"That he was the third man. He was. But he did not go all the way on that trip. The commandant trusted no one. Bergman was taken as a kind of escort and put ashore at a little village west of Nordkapp while the other two went on alone. Bergman had an idea of so very nearly where, but not quite. So he had to have me—who had the details, but didn't know the location."

"But, how did he KNOW—and how did you have them? You were not in the camp. And, another thing—if you knew Bergman, which you must have done to recognise me, how was it that you didn't spot the little things that were different? We were not exactly alike."

"I had never met Bergman."

"But you picked me out in that hotel foyer without hesitation."

## HORNETS' NEST

She laughed. "You looked nervous, you had a sling, and I had a photograph. Other things were smuggled out of the camp besides a map. A snapshot, for the Resistance—for future reference."

"But why—to you?" To Heskin it did not seem to add up, but it was pleasant to talk about it as a problem behind them.

She went on quickly. "He advertised in our papers first—oh, so very discreetly. Then he started writing to me from Spain. He wanted to help me, he was a dear friend of an old comrade. He didn't know I knew."

"Why pick on you, Marianne?"

"Because he knew that anything belonging to—the hostages—would in time get back to me." A dark shadow crossed her face.

Then she sat back on her heels, tearing the paper into shreds which she tossed over the side. "What do you think of the other drawing?"

He shook his head. "It might be anything. Perhaps the plan of a container—the stuff might be buried under the sea. What do those two words mean?" Even now, he dared not reveal his knowledge of Norsk.

"White sand," she said.

There was silence; the ship heaved on the swell with only the stiff rush of the wind through the cordage and a few sea birds crying.

"We have lost so much," she said at last, "all the gear I put on the *Mercur*. Somehow, I had thought it would be buried on land . . . and I had everything. . . ."

"Bergman said it was 'hidden'. I'm sure he used that word. 'Hidden' . . . something if sold to the right people . . . rich for life." For a moment he was back in that

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wrecked compartment, listening to the dying whisper of a voice.

"We will have to wait and see: plan with what we have. Push on fast and take it in turns to watch young Olaf."

"Do you think——?"

"No. He's much too scared to think up any dirty work on his own. But he might try to turn home, run for a port inside the Sound, or sneak off in the dinghy——" she looked out to where it trailed on its long painter—and I don't think we could work the ship alone."

She stood up. "He's had enough rest now—and I must get some. I'll wake him. Do you feel fit enough to take a watch?"

"I feel fine, now."

"By the way—where's the gun?"

"Stuffed under the mattress in the cabin."

"Just as well—we don't want him to see it—unless we have to. Just watch the sun and see he keeps on north and off land. If there's anything you don't like—call me."

He watched her go up the deck and thump on the forward hatch. Soon Olaf's tousled head appeared and he came down to them yawning and rubbing his eyes. He disappeared down a ladder that led to the engine room and after a few preliminary coughs, the diesel started with an uneven beat. When the anchor was up, Marianne gave a smile and went below. As the *Fredheim* turned on her northward course, Heskin was left to his vigil.

It was an odd, lonely day.

Ahead and to port, the sweeping rim of the Arctic Ocean, without a ship to break the sheen of the gentle swell; a smoothness that sometime ran on for ever when the horizon merged with the haze of the overcast sky. To

starboard, only the Islands: great lumps breaking from the sea like broken teeth; wild and desolate, almost uninhabited, a tumble of black scree and bracken.

North Kvaløy . . . Vannøy . . . Fugløy . . . Sørøy. He marked them on their chart as they passed: soft, sad-sounding Norse names, each towering a little steeper, a little higher towards the last great cliff of the North Cape.

If he looked aft from where he was sitting on the fore-deck, there was the sentry-box wheelhouse, the width of the glass screen filled by Olaf's broad shoulders and fresh face, staring unblinking ahead. Above that, the peeling white board with the faint letters *Fredheim*, the yellow funnel and a few gulls circling. There was no communication between them: twice he went back to the galley to brew coffee and find food which were handed through the door of the wheelhouse and accepted without a word.

It was off Sørøy that Olaf made the first move.

When Heskin gave one of his occasional glances towards the stern, a hand appeared from the side of the wheelhouse, beckoning. He walked aft and was gently pulled into the narrow space. Olaf gave him a delightful blank grin and placed his hands on the spokes of the wheel, pointed to the compass card and then made an unmistakeable gesture aft. Heskin nodded and the boy slipped away.

It was something new to do, and it was minutes before he realised that Olaf had not returned. He turned and looked back from one side of the wheelhouse: nothing. He leant across to the other and his heart gave a jump in his mouth. At the very stern, the wet coils of the pulled-in dinghy painter were lying on the deck: the only bit of Olaf that showed was one hand, grasping the counter. He was in the dinghy; must be about to cut it loose.

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Heskin gave one look at the island, a mile on their beam, put his hand on the lever in a quadrant that he guessed was the throttle and jerked it down to idling speed. Then he left the wheel and pounded down the deck.

As he leant over, grasping the ring in the stem of the dinghy, Olaf's face was very close as he sat on the thwart, his eyes wide in bewilderment.

"Get back in the ship," shouted Heskin, waving his free hand. There was no weapon within reach—the gun far below with Marianne and he could not possibly make her hear.

Olaf grinned and shook his head, pointing down the dinghy at something.

Heskin couldn't hold on to that ring for ever and he must make this numbskull understand. He reached forward desperately and yelled in Norsk; "Get back in the ship—or I'll kill you."

A pinpoint of fear glowed for a second in those wide blue eyes and then almost at once they slid up over Heskin's head.

Marianne's voice cut in from behind. "What's going on?" she said.

He turned to look at her standing behind him, wrapped in a blanket, hair blowing free. "He's trying to make a getaway."

"Go back to the wheel, Erik, and get us back on course. I'll settle this."

She came forward after a very short time and leant in the door of the wheelhouse. "He was only baling the water out of it after the rain," she said.

"I'm sorry. But I couldn't get hold of you—and I had to do something."

"You've frightened him, Erik. He says you said you would kill him." There was the veiled question in the flat statement.

"I couldn't make him understand—I suppose I must have looked fierce."

"Oh——" She looked over her shoulder. "Here he is. You had better come down into the cabin with me for a moment. Then I'll take over."

The cabin was just as dingy as before, untidy too, with the blankets ripped back as she had jumped out of bed. But somehow it did not seem so to him after last night. He wanted to fix his mind on that: there had been a change back to what had been before in the few moments they had been speaking. The tone of her voice.

Marianne slipped into her clothes. As she was combing her hair she said, "The change in the noise of the engine made me come up. Where are we now?"

"Off the north tip of Sørøy."

"Had any trouble?"

"Not before this. He was admirable. I was enjoying myself—didn't realise how the time had gone."

She said, "I think that we will have to be careful now—with Olaf. You shouldn't have—looked so ferocious."

"Do you want the gun?" He made to reach over to the back of the mattress.

"No, that would make things worse—unless we really mean to use it. It's safer there. We both know. I think I have a better idea."

She went to the rucksack dumped in the corner and fumbled inside: she came back holding a crumpled grey felt hat. "Do you remember this?"

"Gleb's," he said, "it fell off when he hit the pontoon."

## HORNETS' NEST

"Yes. You remember we took it in the boat. What you don't know is—after you were taken to the farmhouse, I was scared our boat would drift ashore too soon and pinpoint where we were. So I bribed the farmer to tow it further down the Sound, which he did. He came back with the hat we had forgotten. It was obviously too small for you. Then Grästein and the police started to make enquiries and the farmer started to think."

"But I don't see—"

"That it is a threat to them? No. But—" she turned the hat over in her hands—"if I tell Olaf his father was right—and that the hat is hidden on his ship—and that if he isn't a good boy, we will tell the police that they killed Gleb—what then?"

"You think blackmail better than a gun?"

"Certainly. To start with. Now, where can we hide it?"

They both looked round the cabin slowly. Then she pointed. "There—under the ladder to the deck—isn't it a cupboard?"

He bent under the ladder and got his fingers into the keyhole of the door that was about three feet high and flush with the after bulkhead. It was not locked and swinging open easily. But it was not a cupboard. As the gap widened, the noise of the engine doubled in volume and Heskin found he was looking down a short narrow corridor. At the far end the rim of the engine's flywheel shone in the light of the engine room hatch as it spun.

"Nowhere there," he said, closing it, "just a passage into the engine room. They must use it in bad weather, I suppose."

Marianne ran up the ladder until her head and shoulders were above the hatch coaming. "He's still on his course,"

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she said as she came down, "but I'd better not stay below too long. Try and think of the place."

"Does it really have to be hidden? After all, he can't search for it. There's always one of us in here—"

"All right, put it under the mattress with the gun. Now I'll go up. You get some rest."

She was just above him on the ladder, bending down towards him. "Sleep well, Erik." She leant over a little further and quickly touched his lips with hers.

After she had gone, he moved about the cabin for a while, tidying up before he took off his outer clothes. He stood for a moment by the tumble of blankets on the bunk, picturing what it had been like—what he had been imagining during his long watch on deck. She would have been sleeping then, lying on her side with one arm relaxed outside the blankets, palm uppermost, fingers curled. A strand of honey hair would have been falling across her cheek . . . : the pale eyelids flat and the dark lashes spread out. He had seen her asleep so often. But it was different thinking about it now . . . now there was a chance.

It was a deep relaxed sleep that came to him when he had rolled up in the blankets, a long sleep and when he came back from it there had been no summons from the deck. The regular thump of the diesel went on unaltered, but there seemed to be less light than before. He scrambled into his clothes and went up on deck.

Marianne turned from looking to the east. She was standing against the side of the wheelhouse.

"I was just coming to call you. There's Nordkapp."

The overcast had cleared to banks of piled-up clouds in the west and behind them the great ball of the midnight sun was throwing a screen of chequered orange light. The

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sea had that angry jagged look although there was no change in the texture of the swells. But it was the cliff that took his breath away.

The black wall that hemmed the whole of their starboard quarter was sheer, unbroken granite, without a break in colour to suggest grass slope or ledge. The only mark was the thin white line of surf that ran along its foot. The skyline rose up, steadily, with purpose, towards the last block of land: it seemed to soar out there to end in a giant vertical cut of a thousand feet deep. Ultima Thule—the last fist of land, thrust out in challenge across the cold Arctic sea towards the Pole.

"Can you see the tea-house? There—at the very tip."

He looked for a moment at the minute dot that broke the smooth edge of the end of land—then back to her head beside him, the hair glowing, alive in the tawny light that slanted from behind their backs.

"What now?" he said.

"I've been thinking. Your theory about bearings; it might be better to test it now, on the way to Kjelvik. We pass very close!"

"But what about Olaf?"

"We won't go that far with him to know anything, if that's what you mean. We can just run on that course long enough to see if there is a mark, if you are right or not. There's nothing particularly incriminating in telling him to steer a set course for a few minutes."

"And if there is something there——?"

"Sheer off, go to Kjelvik and pay him. Then come back in a boat that we can handle on our own. And that will be much smaller—there won't be such a good compass. It's safer—more accurate, to do it now"

"And if Olaf won't?"

She looked at him. "He will."

They were close to the great cliff now, skirting the black buttresses with their white line of deep-surfing surf. The noise of the engine was tossed back from them to die above in the cloud of screaming birds. Then Olaf's head came out of the wheelhouse door, and an arm, pointing ahead while he shouted.

Marianne dashed to the other side and came back with a pair of glasses. She trained them in the same direction and then handed them to Heskin without a word. They had rounded the last edge of the cape and could see the vista of cliff falling away on the other side. Steaming towards them, on the reverse of the course they were taking, was another fishing boat.

Olaf had taken the glasses, and as he handed them back to Marianne, said something that Heskin could not hear. He was looking now at the rest of the dull sweep of sea. Far off, on their beam, steaming a parallel course to them was another boat, a larger one that showed as a black smudge against the banks of fuming cloud.

"Olaf says it is the boat of a friend of his father's," her voice was grim, "we can't steer away and avoid them, for they will soon recognise our ship too. Keep right down. I'm going to talk to him."

He crouched by the bulwark while the fierce one-sided conversation went on. Then she turned to him. "I think he'll play—get below, quick."

When they had both crawled over the deck and closed the cabin hatch behind them, she said, "I've told him to go on naturally. Not to stop unless they hail him—and if they do—he's alone. I've told him about the hat," she added.

"If we are both cooped up in here—it will be too late to do anything if he does double-cross."

"I know." She looked round the cabin. "But if we keep the hatch open, they will see. Wait a minute, that passage through to the engine room, there's a ladder up to the deck just behind where he stands at the wheel. I'll keep at the bottom of that—and watch proceedings."

She was lifting back the mattress and taking out the gun.

"I'll go," he said.

"No. You might be squeamish."

He looked at the gun she was stuffing into her hip pocket.

"Are you going to use that?"

"I hope not—but it is as well to have it." She bent down under the ladder, opened the door and crawled through.

He waited, peering down the dark tunnel, while the thump and clatter of the engine swept round him. He saw Marianne's legs skirt the rim of the flywheel and then turn towards the lowest rungs of the ladder. The noise went on steadily.

Without warning it cut to the fainter irregular chuff of the idling note. He could hear the lapping of the water as the ship went on under her own way. Then there was a faint scrape, the light from the porthole was blotted out, the sound of muffled voices.

It seemed an age before the engine picked up its beat again, longer before Marianne crawled back through the door and shut it behind her. She was white and breathing hard.

"Well, he played—but only just. There was something they said to each other, I couldn't quite hear it all, but I didn't like what I did."

"What was it?"

"I'll find out in a minute—when they have moved further off. But it scared him, Erik—even more."

"Did he see the gun?"

"No." She threw it on the bunk. "That will have to be the last resort."

Something in the movement of the ship, almost imperceptible, but steady and strong, made him look up. "Marianne—he's turning the ship."

She was up the ladder wrenching at the inside bolt of the hatch; as he turned to follow her, his eye caught the gleam of the automatic lying on the blanket. Safer without—there had been enough of that. He lifted the mattress and pushed it back underneath.

By the time he had got to the deck, she had dragged Olaf from the wheel and was holding him by the front of his shirt, shaking him. It would have been funny to watch at another time as she had to stand on tip-toe to do it.

"Take the wheel," she shouted, "and put her back along the cliff while I talk to this—"

They were heading straight out to sea now: the fishing boat had vanished behind them round the point of the cape; the other one on their beam was still there, a little closer. He spun the wheel round and the bows veered back to the cliff.

Marianne pushed Olaf in through the door of the wheelhouse.

"He wants to put us ashore," she said. "He tells me that his friends say there are enquiries about us at Kjelvik—from the police. He had enough sense to mention he had dropped us at a beach on Sørøy, but he's had enough. I've agreed: provided he puts us at the place we want—"

she stared across Olaf's broad back—"I said you would give him the course—a bearing on the Horn."

Now the dot of the tea-house had reappeared on the top of the cliff as their course turned to the south: the tapering spire of the Horn showed dark against the sky as it jutted out from the face of the Cape.

"Look," said Marianne, "—Hornvikka——"

He made out the funnelled circle of the bay, the zig-zag path that ran up the cliffs and the red and black wreckage of the rusty burnt-out jetty at its base. To the side, a black wedge of rock jutted out into the sea.

"That must be Hornsness," he whispered. "They are there."

"How soon can we start to make our run in?" she said.

He tried to measure the direction. "Tell him to turn out to the east a bit—and then come round slowly on to 309°. It should be about right."

They had started to turn in when she suddenly pointed. "What's that?"

He followed the line of her finger: high on the dark sky-line a pale light flickered on and off in a broken rhythm.

"Morse," he said. "It's from the tea-house isn't it? Someone's signalling. Is it a coastguard station?"

"I don't think so." She put her head inside the wheelhouse. "Olaf says no," she said when she turned.

"Well, someone's signalling to us."

"They can't be—perhaps it is to the other side of the fjord."

He moved round to the other side of the deck, searching to open water. "It's not," he called, "that other ship—she's closer—and she is answering them."

She gave one look and then shouted something to Olaf. "There's no time to waste then. We'll have to run in on the course—and then he'll have to land us—at Hornvikka. Before there are too many people nosing around." The beat of the engine quickened.

They were both close together, peering through the side glass on to the compass card in front of Olaf. Heskin looked up to the point of the Cape. The other bearing on the tea-house was nowhere near.

"Where's that gun?" said Marianne softly.

"Under the mattress—I thought you said—"

"Yes. I don't think he'll be any trouble."

Heskin looked at the profile through the glass. Olaf was pale now, with little beads of sweat pricking the side of his jaw: the blue eyes kept on flicking towards them. Then his eyes travelled back to Marianne's hands. They were behind her back, gripping a marlin-spike.

They had been silent, watching the compass card, when she said suddenly.

"Do you know the thing—that first made me believe you?"

"I don't care—as long as you do."

"It was when we left the farm. Do you remember the way they looked at us?"

"I didn't like it. Both the men and the women—it was a look without expression—as if we weren't there."

"The Frozen Face, Erik. If you had felt it before, it would have shown. The Germans—and the Quislings—knew it so well. If we had to speak to them, we gave the shortest answer—but we never saw them—they just weren't there. But you, when you left that farm, you

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didn't flinch as they would have done. You looked puzzled."

There was so much he wanted to say, but it would have to wait. The dot of the tea-house, dark now without its flickering light, had begun to creep round to the right. He looked at it across the compass, starting to read off the bearing.

" $315^\circ$  . . .  $320^\circ$  . . .  $325^\circ$  . . ." he called softly. Then he lifted his eyes straight ahead for a moment to gauge the distance to the cliff.

"But this can't be right. By the time the Cape bears  $348^\circ$ , we'll be right through that face——"

It was Olaf's body and the wheelhouse that saved them: perhaps too, an ingrained instinct of war that made him knock Marianne flat and fall on top of her. There were giant whips cracking all round them. Only bullets that are coming straight at you make that sound. . . .

Time seemed to hang in slow motion before the next burst: then there was that noise again, the smack of lead on wood and the shatter of glass as one of the windows of the wheelhouse fell out on them. Heskin still couldn't believe it as he crawled aft to peer over the engine room coaming.

The black fishing boat—or was she that, with the high-counteried steel hull and the speed of that creaming bow wave?—had come up unbelievably fast on their quarter while they had been intent on plotting the course. Now she was closing on them.

"Keep down," he shouted. The third burst whipped overhead and from behind him, there was a slithering sound and the deck canted as the *Fredheim* started a tight turn to starboard. He rolled over to see Olaf's bulk

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sagging in the confined space of the wheelhouse, filling it, his head bowed on arms, spinning and jamming the wheel to the left.

Then the harsh voice, carried across the water by megaphone or loud-hailer, was unmistakable.

"Stand up and throw down your guns. We are faster and can turn just as quickly. If you don't we shall run you down. You will gain nothing but a wetting."

Now Marianne was on her knees. "He's right, Erik—as usual." She stood up and walked round the wheelhouse, hands in the air. They did not watch the black hull loom up on them as they lowered the dead Olaf from the jammed wheel, spun it back to centre and cut their engine: only there was the sound of the deep throb of engines coming closer and the heavy hiss of the bow wave. As the two counters scraped, the fore-deck of the *Fredheim* was swarming with squat grey figures and Grästein towering among them: and then, hustled down to the cabin, they were pushed on to opposite bunks where their legs were straddled and tied by the ankles to ring-bolts in the floor. There was nothing to do but watch the search of the cabin until they were left alone with the third of the trio from the *Mercur*. Not a word had been spoken: Grästein had not appeared.

Pavel—Heskin did not know his Christian name—sat straddled across a corner of the table between them, one hand coiled round a big automatic, the other engaged in the exploration of his teeth with the point of a match. Marianne looked very small, somehow crumpled, as she sat opposite Heskin. The silence was broken by the tramp of feet overhead and then the splash of something large and heavy going over the side.

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"This is the one that doesn't speak English," said Marianne suddenly.

Pavel's eyes slid over to her and he removed the match-stick from his mouth long enough to say, "Nyet."

Marianne ignored it. "Did you see the uniform? They are funny people. All badges taken off—but they forgot to remove the stitch marks. The pattern of the star was quite clear—"

While she was talking Pavel had put down his gun. Then he leaned over quite slowly and hit her across the mouth with the back of his hand.

Heskin heard the hollow sound as her head bounced back on the panelling; watched the slow trickle of blood run down the corner of her jaw. Pavel swung upright and went on with his excavation.

Then Marianne started to sing. It was her song—very soft, she was almost humming it, but he could hear the words. And they were different.

"The gun is under your seat, Erik—the gun is under your seat. . . ."

Pavel leaned and raised his hand and she stopped abruptly.

It was too dangerous to do anything in reply except stare straight at her. Then he leant back against the side of the ship as if to get more comfortable. It was still there . . . he could feel the hard lump of the Colt under the mattress where he had stuffed it. He had forgotten all about it—and they had not thought of searching under the place they had thrown him.

He stared at her again, giving the slightest of nods with his head. Then his eyes travelled down past Pavel's legs to the after bulkhead of the cabin. Under the ladder that

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led to the deck was the square of that door they had opened. When he looked back, he saw that her eyes had followed his.

Pavel went on with his picking: overhead there were further sounds of feet crossing the deck and then their own engine gave its few opening spasms before breaking into an even beat: there was a scrape and bumping along the ship's side and the light of the cabin increased as one port-hole cleared of the shadow that blocked it.

The hatch opened: slowly, carefully, the grey bulk of Grästein lowered itself into the cabin.

He stood looking at them while he jerked some quick hissing sentences at his assistant. Then Pavel slipped off the table and went up the ladder, closing the hatch behind him.

"Good morning," said the grey man. "I'm afraid I'm very angry with you."

Heskin and Marianne looked straight at each other without answering.

"First," Grästein went on, "I make you a fair offer and you spurn it. Then you force me to use violence, which I detest. Lastly, you make the search to find you so difficult that I have to call in outside assistance—which means more to watch and less in the end for myself."

He stood brooding for a moment, looking down at them, while he rocked on his heels.

"There is no time left for play now. Where are those papers?"

There was a long silence.

Grästein shrugged and then looked at his watch. "You can have exactly three minutes alone to discuss this—and

make up your minds. If you can't, I shall have to introduce measures I dislike."

He paused with one foot on the ladder, looking towards the battered brown case that Pavel had found and thrown on the bunk beside Marianne. "You still have the money, I see. Well, I will keep my word—if you talk you can still have it." That smile came again. "Though I fear you may find it rather difficult to use. You didn't tie up friend Gleb too well, Herr Bergman, and he came to the surface after two days. Of course I had to tell the police all I knew—and they will be waiting at Kjelvik to ask you all about it."

No one answered him.

"So that you have all the facts—and to satisfy curiosity, I will tell you first how I found you here, then what I propose. It was lucky I happened to be present when you were displaying such a great interest over the chart of Nordkapp. So, when you disappeared with the boat of a farmer who lived near the *Tirpitz*, what more natural than to go to the place of your questioning, set up my headquarters and wait? When I got the signal that the boat was nosing round, I was certain.

"For the moment, we are no more than a party of four on this ship—yourselves, Pavel and I. My friends have an aversion to lingering in other people's territorial waters. They have gone to wait outside the limit until we have finished our business. Amicably, I hope."

He mounted the ladder and the deck hatch closed.

Heskin strained forward as far as he could. "Don't let him do anything, Marianne. Tell him—I think we can trust him to keep his word—and then let's get out of the rest of it as best we can."

"No."

He said, very softly, "I understood what you sang—did you——? His eyes travelled down to the door behind the ladder.

"Yes."

"Then the only hope is to get me left alone in here . . . back up anything I start . . ."

The seconds dragged out while the diesel kept up its steady beat. Heskin wondered dully where they were heading: the course must have been changed or they would have been up to the cliff long ago. Then a shaft of light slanted down from above and Grästein lowered himself rung by rung to the cabin floor.

"Well?"

There was no answer.

He gave a deep sigh, moved between Heskin and the table towards the forward bulkhead, and took a jug of water from above the bulkhead lockers. He put it on the table and went back to the far end, perching there as he pulled a length of thin cord from his pocket. As he started tying knots at each inch of its length, he went on talking.

"Why do you make me do this? Please tell me and save us from a situation that will never allow things to be the same again."

No one spoke. And the soft disinterested voice went on.

"Do you read the form of literature known as the thriller, Herr Bergman? I must confess I enjoy them—but I can never understand the lengths to which authors go in the realms of modern science to extract a confession. All these truth drugs—the unknown injections administered under hospital conditions to give torment—they are

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not necessary." He held up the rope. "They had the answer with this—and some water—three hundred years ago."

He came over to Heskin and measured the cord round his head just above the ears: then he took it off and tied a loop just short of the required length, returning to jam this tight round his forehead. It was uncomfortable, the knots biting in hard.

"Wet ropes shrink, Herr Bergman—as you will know if you have done any camping. That cord must be unpleasant—? When I wet it—" he picked up the water jug and poured the contents slowly round the top of Heskin's head—"when I do that, it will start to contract—gradually—but with terrible force. I'm told it is worse than the worst neuralgia . . . but it goes on from there . . . until something breaks. . . ."

Heskin shook the water out of his eyes and looked straight at Marianne. "No," she said: and it was an order.

The pain started quite soon; a dull shooting thing that ran down the back of his neck and stabbed behind the eyes. Grästein looked across at Marianne.

"And while we are waiting," he said, "I think I shall try some applied psychology on you."

He went over and stood directly in front of her. With a quick movement, one hand gripped her hair and the other caught the back of her shirt, ripping it backwards and downwards over her bound arms as the buttons ripped off one by one. She was wearing nothing underneath it.

"I have noticed your aversion," he said, "—now we will see how much you do like my hands."

He looked at the back of them for a moment and then turned one over: with a swift movement, he started to rub

the black fur up and down against the point of her breast. The sound of her scream as she arched away from him was horrible.

"No," said Heskin; this time it was not an order, but surrender. "Steer 309° on the Hornsness, Grästein . . . she knows the rest . . . she will give it to you. But stop that."

"Good."

He let go of her and came round the end of the table, reaching forward to rip the knotted cord upwards.

"I sincerely hope she will, Herr Bergman, for I do not want to have to go through this again."

Marianne was lying back, her breath coming in deep shuddering gulps. Her body looked very white through the tatters of the shirt that hung down in front of her. Grästein was looking too, and when he spoke, his voice changed completely.

"Let me untie your hands and feet, Fru Bergman: then you can get more clothing."

He bent down behind her, only to jerk away with a grunt of pain as he shook free from the teeth that had buried in the upper part of his arm. He stood back rubbing the place, a faint smile flickering over the square features.

"Understandable. . . . But I do not think I care to risk it again." He opened a clasp knife, picked up his gun and came over to Heskin. "Bend forward," he said, "and don't try anything—because I shall shoot to hurt."

When he was free, he found another shirt in the rucksack, untied Marianne and helped her put it on. As he bent over to free her wrists, he was able to get his mouth close to her ear. "Not yet," he breathed.

Grästein said, "I shall separate you. As the lady will be less trouble and you say she knows everything—she can come with me." He looked round the cabin. "As you cannot get out of here, Bergman, I shall not tie you up again. But, remember, if you try anything—or your wife is unco-operative—she will take the consequences."

He pushed Marianne up the ladder in front of him and the hatch banged shut.

Heskin pulled over the mattress and grabbed the gun. He cocked it and put it in his hip pocket. Then he stood at the bottom of the ladder, thinking hard.

The worst of it was there could not be much time. The beat of the engine had not altered—they might have been circling—have moved off to the far side of the fjord, or already be back on their proper course. With what he had had to give Grästein, Marianne could not bluff for long with false directions. He thought of what might happen if she tried . . . and was frightened. So it was all his . . . but how? He dared not try and rush the deck, even with a gun. He could get through to the engine room—and they did not know that. But there was another ladder to climb, directly behind the ~~the~~ man, so there could not be surprise. Perhaps in some way, he might get them into the engine room one by one . . .

The first thing was to stop anyone getting back in the cabin: he kicked off his shoes and crept up the ladder, easing the inside bolt home: then down to open the door to the passage.

The noise beat on him. He crawled on, round the edge of the shining rim of the flywheel, then along the side of the engine sheltered from the deck ladder. There was

just time to look up the gleaming rungs of it and see the back of Pavel's legs to the front of the deck opening.

There was little room or light in the space between the bulk of the cylinders and the side of the hull. Everything was noise and vibration. He saw, running along the side, a chain that went at intervals over pulleys. As he watched, it jerked and moved a fraction. The steering gear. . . . Jam it somehow—and make them come down to investigate? No, too certain of human agency . . . they would know. He faced the engine, cursing that he knew so little about diesels.

Three copper pipes branched from a round thing on the crankcase and ended in a square box on each of the cylinders. They must be the injectors for the fuel . . . and the bottom one, the fuel pump. Then this other, larger pipe leading from the pump must connect with the main fuel tank. He followed it down to the stern, past the tail shaft, pausing irresolute as he saw something else: in a gap in the floor plates, washed by the slop of the bilge, was a round wheel. A sea-cock? . . . Open that? But they had the means of escape and he would drown. It was the fuel tank or nothing.

He came to it, feeling his way in the cramped darkness and stench of the stern, a fat barrel fixed athwart. He found the tap where the fuel line went in, but he could not touch that. Taps do not turn themselves off—even with vibration. More important, the engine would stop: and if things went right, he was certain that neither he nor Marianne possessed the slightest idea of how to start it again. What was wanted was a method of making it run badly. Remembering car breakdowns of the past, he scraped some grease from the tail-shaft, and reaching

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over the belly of the fuel tank, pressed it hard into the air-vent of the filler cap. No pump could pull for long against the vacuum that it would cause.

It worked sooner than he expected. Within a minute the cylinder missed a beat and then the engine went on in the dot-and-carry rhythm of a peg-legged man. He picked up a monkey wrench that was lying on the plating, and crouched back in the shadow of the engine, waiting.

The shaft of light that filtered down from the wheelhouse was blocked out by feet and legs coming backwards down the ladder. It was Pavel. As he took a firmer grip on the wrench, Heskin smiled grimly. Pavel was coming 'un to gloom and noise out of bright daylight.

They circled, with the engine between them, as Pavel felt his way round to the pump side. Soon they were opposite and Heskin levered himself up inch by inch until he could see over the top of the cylinders. Pavel's head was there, just below, bent in concentration. Remembering that smack in Marianne's face and all the pain and horror that followed, he brought the wrench down with all the strength in his body.

In that noise there was no evidence of Pavel's going. He just disappeared. But Heskin knew from the feel of that blow, there was no need to follow up with another. He crawled back towards the stern and resumed his watch.

It was longer, more anxious, for twice he thought the engine would stop altogether. He watched the slowing spin of the tail-shaft, wondering if the vibration would shake the cylinders from their mountings. Then the hatch went dark again and the sudden thin boom from a torch

stabbed over the top of the engine. As he pressed flat, he thought he heard that harsh voice calling, "Pavel . . . Pavel . . ." But Pavel, lying invisible on the far side, would never answer.

The torch went out, a pause, and then, one after the other, grey shoes groped their way down the rungs of the ladder. There was no advantage now, because of the torch: but, more urgent, what had happened to Marianne, that Grästein could leave the wheel? Heskin dropped his spanner and scrambled forward, pulling out the Colt. Before the great shoulders were past the hatch coaming, and Grästein could either bend or turn, Heskin shot twice at point-blank range.

The sound of the gun was lost in the general noise. The grey man hung there for a moment, sagging against the strength of his arms alone, before sliding with a crash to the engine room plating. Heskin had not waited; he was back at the stern now, reaching up to scrape the grease off the vent of the filler cap. Without waiting for the engine to pick up its normal beat, he started to crawl up the far side of the cylinders.

As he reached the forward end, just before it took up the normal beat, from round the corner of the engine came a horrible sound. It was as if a very big fish was bumping and threshing against the floor plates of the engine room. Then he thought he heard that harsh voice calling desperately . . . "Pavel, spasite . . . Pavel, spasite!"

No sign of anything in the square of light that was the exit to the deck: he must find out what had happened to Marianne. But though he had crawled over the soft yielding bulk of Pavel, lying face-down in the bilge, somehow he could not face the move round the engine

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and up the ladder to the deck. As he edged his way round the flywheel, he had a moment's view of a still grey shoulder sagging against the far side of the hull. Then he was through the passage up the ladder to unbolt the cabin hatch and scramble on to the deck.

They were steaming in a wide circle, the wheel unmaned. There had been no help from Marianne, for she was lying on the foredeck with her hands lashed behind her and secured to a ring-bolt. He was panting as he knelt to unloose them.

"Are you all right? Did he——?"

"No." She sat up and started to rub her wrists. "What happened—? I knew what you would try—but first, the engine, it went funny—then Pavel went down and didn't come back. Grästein was angry. He tied me here and went himself. The engine is all right again—and you come up the other way."

He told her quickly. "Pavel isn't a worry any more," he said, "but Grästein—I don't know. He wasn't moving afterwards, but he's got a gun."

They were back in the wheelhouse now; the cliff was farther away and far out to sea to the north of them a black smudge that might be Grästein's friends. He centred the wheel and put the *Fredheim* on a straight course.

"Have you any idea of where we are?"

"Not very far off that bearing. They were just getting on to it when the engine went. Since then we've been going round in a wide circle."

"Will you put her on the course? I'll have to see to him. If he's alive, he might try to set fire to the ship or sink her—anything."

He went to the lip of the hatch and peered down into

the thudding darkness. The light slanted past him on to the ladder to throw a patch of brightness against the engine room floor. Nearest, lay the Luger, square and black: at the far side, jutting through the shadow, he saw Grästein's grey cuff and hand, palm upwards, still, the fingers curled.

"Grästein!" he called. There was no answer. He turned to Marianne. "I can see his gun. I shall have to go down and get it to make sure."

Feeling that his own gun was safe in his hip pocket, Heskin put his legs over the edge and turned to make a cautious landsman's descent, facing the ladder.

It was just when his head was level with the lip of the hatch and he was preparing to turn outwards for a last look before he reached the floor, that it happened. Without warning, both ankles were gripped from behind. Like iron bands, the clamps tightened, while a weight pressed against his legs, preventing kicking. Then the hands started to pull him down.

He screamed. His fingers slipped from one rung and just managed to catch the next. He could feel them being torn from their hold, the ache in his arms becoming almost unbearable as the pull increased. Then Marianne was above, lying flat on the deck as she tried to grab his shoulders. Her face was very close to him.\*

"No good," he sobbed. "—Too strong. Get my gun—in-pocket—"

There was fear in her eyes and she did not seem to hear. In his desperation, he did not realise what he shouted to try and make her understand: "*Skynn deg. . . . Revolveren er i baklommen. . . .*"

From below him a horrible, sobbing noise came out of

the darkness. Then she was reaching over, gripping his shoulder, and he felt the weight go from his pocket. The four shots sounded no louder than a hammer on wood; at the first three, the clamps jerked tighter, but with the last they slipped away quietly.

He hardly remembered how he managed to get back on deck and bolt the hatch. Then he was leaning against the wheelhouse door, trying to stop the shaking. Marianne had gone back to the wheel. The chug of the diesel went on steadily. They were very near the black cliff of Nord-kapp now.

"Thank you," he said. "I—"

She did not turn round and her voice came back to him, cold, indifferent: "You had better take that cross-bearing soon."

He went round to the far side of the wheelhouse and it was easier to read the marking on the compass card now there was no glass left in the window frame. He lined up on the dot of the tea-house and started to call softly as the card swung.

" $335^{\circ}$  . . .  $337^{\circ}$  . . .  $340^{\circ}$  ." He strayed for a moment from the mark: first to Marianne's profile, so close so expressionless, then round the empty circle of the sea. He looked down at the card, then back at the Cape. . . .  $345$  . . . then said suddenly, "Cut the engine. We're wrong . . . we're too close. I can't see the tea-house any more. It's disappeared over the top."

The beat of the engine died to that irregular cough as her hand moved the lever back on the quadrant. The black wall of the cliff was only a hundred yards off and they had to tilt their heads back to see the top of it: now they could hear the dull boom of the surf and the scream-

## HORNETS' NEST

ing of the birds. The *Fredheim* drifted on under her own way.

He was staring ahead, searching.

"Keep her on course, Marianne—and take her in very slow. I won't be a minute."

Then he was stumbling up the fore-deck, right into the angle of the bows, holding on to the jack stay to lean out as far as possible. At fifty yards he was certain, and there was an uplift of triumph in the shout that he tossed back to her in the face of the noise ahead. "Come up here. . . . Quick!"

He gripped her arm and pointed. "Look—we're not wrong. It's only that the bearings were taken as back-bearings, from the top of the cliff. Do you see—there? Straight ahead—in that dark patch—between the two spurs?"

"It's a shadow."

"No. There's no line of surf at the foot. The water goes right in there. It's a cave."

## XII

THEY had to edge the *Fredheim* in.

Behind them they left an empty circle of sea, without even a trace of the ship that had been there before. The cave was a tall narrow crack that slanted in from the south-east and after they were past the slabs that flanked the entrance, the shadow fell, changing within yards from grey twilight to a darkness they had not known for months.

Heskin had gone to the bows, holding up the pressure lamp he had taken from the cabin, trying to guide Marianne at the wheel. The yellow rays reached out to touch the sheer granite walls that soared into the shadows above them: ahead, the black water heaved out of sight into the darkness beyond the edge of the light. They were moving dead slow, with the boom of the exhaust echoing round them. Suddenly it cut to nothing: as they drifted on, there was another sound in its place, the hiss and sigh of the Arctic Ocean as it surged along the rocks: cold, lonely, and inexpressibly sad.

Marianne came in the edge of the light like a ghost.

"It's no use. I can't see a thing. We'll have to anchor here and go on in the dinghy."

She stared up into the darkness. "What a fantastic place—it must be twenty metres high." Her voice came back to them, hollow and muffled.

There was no way on the *Fredheim* when they had got the dinghy alongside. When he had heaved the anchor over the side they watched the chain jerk from its coils

on the deck and snake out through the hawse pipe. The echo of the roar beat around them. Suddenly it stopped as the last links jerked taut and when he held the lamp over the side, the chain was hanging straight.

"No bottom," he said, "it hasn't grounded. We'll have to let her drift."

She was beside him, peering down into the water. "No. The tide may be on the ebb—and she might drift out. Those thugs may come back to see what's happening and spot her." There was a pause and then she went on softly, almost to herself. "She's a marked boat now—anywhere. There's so little to take from her and so much to hide. You heard what he said about the police. No. We must sink her: here—and now."

He stared at her. "Sink her? But how do we go on?"

"In the dinghy of course. Take our things, some blankets and food. When we know—if they are there—we can either take them if they are not ~~too~~ bulky, or come back later. Either way, we can row out of the cave and round to the first village. The dinghy is less conspicuous than a great boat."

"There's two things," he said. "If we have to dig, what do we use? There's nothing here. And—"

She cut in and there was that rough edge to her voice again.

"Our hands—if necessary. What do you want to do—walk round Finnmark asking for the loan of two spades? That would make the police think."

"The police are the other thing—they're looking for me. Even if we find the stuff, how can we get away?"

She stared at him very steadily. "I think it would be better to leave that one until it comes."

## HORNETS' NEST

He lowered his eyes. "Well, if we are to scuttle her—at least I know where the sea-cock is. I found it when I was in the engine room."

"Good. But first we must get the stuff up and into the dinghy."

Even with the difficulty of working in the dark before she was able to get her torch from the rucksack, it did not take long because there was so little to take. Their clothes, a roll of blankets, some tins of food and the rucksack made a very small pile on the foredeck beside the lamp. Marianne jumped down into the dinghy and took the bundles from him one by one, last of all, the lamp. Then she handed up her torch. "Now go and open her up," she said.

He flashed his torch back toward the stern and stood hesitating. From behind him, her voice came up from the dinghy, cool and taunting: "Don't you trust me—or are you afraid—of two dead men?"

"Hell, neither." He almost ran back to the wheelhouse.

The worst part was the descent of the ladder; rung by rung, facing outwards this time, with the torch steadied on the grey bulk huddled at the foot. But Grästein did not move. When he had stepped over him, it was easy to creep back past the engine and lever open the valve he had seen before. Now, above the slop of the bilge, was the deeper sound of rushing water.

When he regained the ladder, he stopped and pulled Grästein's body gently to one side, picking up the Luger that lay underneath. For a moment, he let the torch play on the square box of the face that stared up at him with a faint expression of bewilderment: the sunken, open eyes seemed to sharpen the image of that stone idol he had first thought of in the train—it seemed so long ago.

## HORNETS' NEST

As he looked down, there was no hate, no feeling of any kind left in him. He went up the ladder quickly and closed the hatch.

Marianne's voice was sharp. "What have you been doing? I was getting scared. She's starting to settle."

He lowered himself to the centre thwart and pushed off from the *Fredheim* with one of the sculls. "The valve was stiff—and then I stopped to take this off Grästein." He turned to show her the Luger.

She almost snatched it away. "The idea is to hide evidence—not keep it." There was a dull splash. "One gun is enough."

"Where is it?"

"In my pocket."

He pulled off a few strokes and then rested on the sculls, watching the *Fredheim*. Already she was well down, settling by the stern. From behind him came Marianne's voice again. There was roughness in it.

"That's all past and done with. For God's sake—get on."

Another two strokes and the lamp she held in the bows no longer reached the ship. The last he saw was one gleam of the yellow funnel and then there was nothing but the circle of light against the dark water, the creak of the rowlocks and the diamond drips of water falling from the sculls between each stroke.

He rowed on, listening to the soft directions coming from behind him: then, between each pull, started talking in jerks.

"I've been thinking . . . this cave should narrow soon . . . there should be a beach of some kind. . . ."

"Why? Why should there be?" Again there was that edge on her voice.

## HORNETS' NEST

"That map of yours . . . we've only thought of it as . . . standing on end . . . why shouldn't it be on its side . . . a cross-section. . . . If it is, we are in the funnel part . . . and then it narrows . . . blocked by round things . . . they could be rocks . . . or shingle."

There was no answer and he went on rowing. Suddenly, her voice came again, excitedly, in Norwegian: he stopped the sculls in mid-stroke. Then she said, very softly, "That was a very good guess, Erik. There's something dead ahead."

He scrambled over the thwart and up to the bows beside her. As far as he could see in that light, the cave was lower and narrower: in front, it was cut by a short steep beach made of black shingle, on which the tip of the sea spent itself in short angry rushes. Behind it, the roof curved down to seal everything off in a smooth blank wall. Except in one place. To the left of the centre was a small black hole.

They drifted in: when the keel grated they both jumped out and dragged the dinghy up on the beach. Then Marianne lifted the lamp and moved a few yards up the shingle. "What do we want?" he called after her.

"Just the rucksack. And pull the boat up a bit. We don't want to lose her on the tide."

When he walked up, she was crouching just beyond the circle of the lamp. He could just make out the yellow fall of hair and the pale oval of her face. Between them the black pebbles gleamed like wet coals: behind the sea slashed at the shingle in a steady beat.

"That is the third time," she said.

He dropped the rucksack and stood staring at her. "The third time——? I don't understand," he said.

## HORNETS' NEST

Her voice went on without any expression, as if she were very tired.

"At Sørrøy—when Olaf was baling out the dinghy, and you thought he was going to escape—you shouted at him in Norsk—at least, I thought you did, just as I was coming up from the cabin. I might have been mistaken, but when Grästein had you by the legs—and you were frightened—you shouted where the gun was—in fluent slang, right in my face. Just now, I told you to stop rowing—and you did at once. You learn a language quickly."

He stared at his feet. "It is the only lie I have ever told you. I do speak Norsk—I always have. My mother was Norwegian, and she taught me. It was long ago—but I have never forgotten."

"Why did you not tell me—in the beginning?"

He made a hopeless gesture. "You would not have believed me."

"I see." She got up. "Well, it's not the time now to go into your childhood. I'll go ahead with the lamp—you take the torch and the rucksack. We'll see if this hole goes anywhere—how good your guessing can be." She was speaking in Norwegian.

It was a tunnel, man-made, he thought, as he toiled miserably behind her under the weight of the rucksack. The floor rose up steeply in the first few yards, then turned down to a gradual decent. The going was rough, over boulders the size of footballs, smooth, wet, dangerous. As they stumbled on, he could see the gleam of them in the swinging lamp, the bands of water running down the walls. Soon, the boom of the sea faded and there was nothing but the scrape of their boots on the rock, the sound

## HORNETS' NEST

of their breath, or a whispered curse as one or other stumbled.

Marianne was moving fast and the weight of the rucksack made it hard for him to keep up. The swaying lamp moved farther away and below him. They must be under the sea-level now.

He had to stop and loosen the torch from his belt to light his way and when he stumbled on he saw that the lamp ahead had stopped moving.

Marianne did not speak until he had scrambled over the last few yards to stand beside her. Then she said: "Your guessing continues to be good. Look—"

The broken fall of ground stopped at their feet. In front and to each side of them, as far as the light would carry, was a sheet of black water. It had the utter stillness that made it look like a pavement of polished marble. He bent down to feel—and it was cold; a numbing cold that drove all sensation from his fingers. He touched his hand to his mouth and found that it was fresh.

"Shine your torch outwards, Erik."

They watched the finger of light sweep out over the pool and then circle up in the air. As their eyes became accustomed, they could make out the smooth straight walls slipping down into the water, soaring high above to the vaulted dome of the roof. It was like a church—and, as in a church, they spoke in hushed voices, almost whispering.

"Is there anything beyond? Shine it out there. Straight ahead."

He screwed the focus to the longest beam and threw the light forward over the water. On the far side, directly opposite, the wall was broken by a low arch, another

opening. Through that, the black sheet stretched on uninterrupted. Then—it was so far that the light could scarcely reach it—was something long and low and white.

She let out her breath in a quiet sigh. “The guessing is still right—two circles connected, these two caves—and then the white sand.”

“And they are there,” he said.

“Yes. Save your torch—we will need all of the battery.”

He snapped it out and they were left in the circuit of yellow light. “What do we do now, Marianne?”

She looked up from where she was fumbling with the straps of the rucksack. “Do——? Go over, of course.”

“But how?”

She did not seem to hear this. “I think we have a great piece of luck here,” she said. “I brought along a lot of odds and ends from the farm-house that might be useful. Matches, candles, string—things like that. But I quite forgot this.”

She was pulling things from under the flap as she spoke. At last there came out a tight-rolled cylinder of proofed material, with a tube ending in a valve sticking out of one corner. “They like comfort,” she said, “it’s an air mattress.”

He was staring at her, stupidly. “But—we can’t both get on that.”

“We don’t. It is to carry the torches over. And bring—them—back. We wade and push it.”

“But it may be very deep.”

“Then we swim.”

When they had inflated the mattress and laid it on the water, she stood up and started to peel her shirt over her head.

## HORNETS' NEST

"All our clothes?" he said.

"We want them dry when we come back. Come on—don't stand there staring. We'll be cold enough in a minute without hanging about now."

He sat on a boulder and started to unlac his shoes: stopped to watch her piling her hair on top of her head, then the fall of the clothes to her feet. Suddenly she stopped and began a rummage in the bottom of the rucksack. "The other torch," she said, "—and this—they never forget it." She held up a bottle of clear white fluid. "Have some Aqavit, I think we will both need it."

She pulled the cork with her teeth and tilted the bottle back in her mouth so that he could see the ripple run down her throat as she swallowed. She coughed and handed the spirit across, before going down to the raft and laying the two torches on it, facing out from one end, alight.

"We'll leave the lamp here," she said, "too dangerous to take—it might fall off."

As he took a gulp and the resinous spirit stabbed down his throat, he was still watching her. The last film of underclothing fell away and she was standing there so slim and straight and pale, with her body gleam in the yellow light of the hissing lamp. He put the bottle on the raft and they stepped down into the water side by side.

It was so cold that a line of deadness crept up his body from thigh to waist, nipping out all the glow that had been left by the spirits. They pushed the raft from the back, wading very slowly, peering round the edges to see where the light of the two torches was flickering round the dark entrance to the second chamber. Chest deep . . . he looked sideways at the pale gleam of her shoulders and

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then to the fan of ripples stretching out behind back towards the yellow ball of the lamp, now grown so small.

"Swim, Marianne."

They struck out with their legs holding the raft, and there was no bottom under them as they crept through the opening to the second pool. With each stroke the white thing ahead became broader, larger. Then the ground came back under their feet, they were stumbling in the shallows and pulling the raft up on a beach of pure white sand. In the glow of the torches they stood like ghosts, each shrouded in a cloak of white mist as the chill water was driven from them by the heat of their bodies. He watched the coils of vapour smoking from her back and arms as she reached down for the Aqavit bottle. She took a pull and then passed it over without speaking. Now her torch was sweeping the sand in widening circles. He saw the marks at once.

"Footprints," she said. "They come from the water and then fork each way. You take those going to the right."

He picked up the other torch and started to follow them.

There were two sets, deeply indented, side by side, and they looked as if they had been made yesterday. He followed them diagonally back to the far corner of the beach where the smooth wall came down to seal it off. The containers were not even buried: the dull green bolted ends that sealed them were sticking out of the sand—four in all. When he knelt and scrabbled at the side of one, it came away easily, a green cylinder about three feet long, not very heavy.

He picked up the torch and looked back to the far side

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of the beach: there was no feeling of cold or tiredness now, only triumph. He could see the steady motionless glow of her torch lying on the sand.

"Marianne!" His voice cracked and jumped an octave. "They are here. We've got them!"

There was no answer.

He shouted again, but nothing came back but the lap of the water against the beach. The feel of victory drained from him as he started to move over towards her. As he picked his way with the torch, he noticed that the same two sets of footprints had made another path in that direction.

Her light did not move: it was on the ground beside her as she knelt, head bent and very still, staring at something long and dark that lay at the edge of the pool.

It was the body of a man: blackened, half-mummified, it had been there for a long time, but she stared at it unflinching. Then she bent forward to try and straighten one of the arms. As she touched the rotting cloth, the whole thing fell away from the shoulder.

There was something in her pose as she tried to push it together again—the tender, absorbed intensity of a child gathering the pieces of a broken toy—that made him know.

As he watched, one by one, the fragments scattered over the last weeks fell into place . . . the professor's words about her . . . the tears when she had finished the story . . . that photograph . . . the worn wedding ring.

...

"Your husband. . . ." The words came out spontaneously from his realisation, but the moment they were uttered, he knew what they had done.

## HORNETS' NEST

After a long silence, she looked up at him, very pale, dry-eyed.

"Yes. And I must ask you to help me bury him."

"But—"

"Now."

Throughout, he felt no fatigue, no cold—only a growing, aching sickness. Beside him, she worked steadily and in silence. Only when they were done, and she was smoothing down the long mound, did he notice that the wedding-ring had gone from her hand.

She did not look at him when she spoke. "You say they are there?"

"Yes."

"How many containers?"

"Four. They're not very heavy—not even buried properly."

"Would you—get them up and take them down to the raft? I'll be with you in a moment."

He left her in her solitude and went back to the far corner of the cave. He scraped the cylinders out one by one and carried them down to load on to the raft. While he waited for her to come, he took another gulp of Aqavit, but the shaking would not stop.

Then she came into the range of his torch, a pale slim column. She shook her head at the offer of the bottle and without a word waded into the water.

They swam back and then dressed in silence. Only when they had finished did he dare to speak. It had become unbearable—that withdrawn indifference, the eyes that looked right through him each time she had to glance his way. He remembered. . . . "The Frozen Face."

## HORNETS' NEST

"Marianne, I'm terribly——"

For the first time she seemed to notice him. She stood there in the yellow light, combing her hair; shirt torn, trousers stained, but so very, very beautiful.

"Terribly what——?"

He made a hopeless gesture with his hands. "Sorry...."

She picked up the lamp. "Don't talk about it. Can you manage those things if I take the rucksack and lead the way?"

There was no hurry in her return up the boulder-strewn passage. Often she stopped, holding the lamp high to guide him over the more difficult places, throwing out her free hand to steady him as he swayed and stumbled under the bulky load. At last they were out on the black beach, pushing off the dinghy, with Marianne scrambling past him with the light to get up in the bows.

"You row," she said, "and I'll try and guide you." As he took the strain on the oars, he wondered how long it had been since they both had begun to speak in Norsk. But it didn't matter any more.

It was a long pull. No sound but the creak of the rowlocks and occasionally a soft word of direction from the bows. The light shone past his shoulders, gleaming on the round bulk of cylinders that lay across the stern seat and then went on to be lost in the waste of darkness behind them. There was no trace of the *Fredheim* as they passed over the place where she had been: nothing, except the faint smear of fuel oil that gleamed for a moment from the face of the water and then was gone. Soon, a hint of greyness was stealing in from behind him, and then he could see the walls of the cave, the shape of the smooth swells sliding along their edge. There was

## HORNETS' NEST

a splash—and he knew that the last trace of all, the faithful pressure lamp, had gone over the side.

"That's that," she said. "Pass me up an oar—I'll give you a hand with the pull round."

As he turned to hand it along, he said, "Where are we going?"

"Hornvikka."

It did not take long. Round the Hornsness, the sea empty, the daylight beating down on them, too steady, too bright, and then they were in the bay, shut in by the funnel of thousand-foot cliff on three sides, with clouds of sea birds wheeling and screaming overhead. He stopped rowing and turned to look to land. There was no sign of life on the rocks or rusting burnt-out jetty.

"Come on," said Marianne, "no one ever comes here now. Run her right up to the end of the jetty."

When they had beached the boat on the weed-covered rocks, they scrambled up on to the level stretch of turf that lay beyond. From there the steps led up in a zig-zag path that went on out of sight over the top of the cliff. At the side of the beginning of these was a little sheltered hollow.

Marianne pointed. "There. That will do."

She watched in silence, arms folded, while he made the journeys to bring up all their belongings and lay them on the grass. When it was done, she said, "I'm going for a walk. I want to think."

So she was going to leave him . . . take the money. . . and he would be alone . . . with the police waiting everywhere. Some of his fear must have been mirrored in his face as he turned to stare at her from the laying out of the blankets. She kicked Grästein's battered

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suitcase towards him on the grass, and there was infinite scorn in her voice as she answered.

"No. The money's quite safe. You can look after it. I want to be alone, that's all. I shan't be long."

She turned on her heel and walked out of the hollow.

He busied himself with trying to make a few simple preparations for her return. It was the only thing he could do to try and please her. A tin of herrings opened, some of the black bread cut—he would have made coffee if he had dared to light a fire. Then the beds—he must sleep soon, and he knew she would feel as tired. It was when he had finished spreading the blankets that he noticed. He knelt back, looking at them, puzzled. There had been plenty on the *Fredheim*—but she had only brought six—really only enough for one. . . .

He did not hear the sound of her coming: only the words that bit through the silence from behind made him swing round to look up into the bright round muzzle of the automatic, held so steady and so straight.

"Quisling murderer."

"I don't understand—" But deep in his mind a muffled bell had started to toll.

"So—you want to play it out to the end, Erik Bergmann? Oh, you are very clever—so clever that you nearly fooled me. I might have forgiven all your lies—even the English bank clerk who can conjure up a Norwegian mother the first time he forgets and speaks our tongue. That might have been funny—but how did you come to know your way so surely into that cave, and—how—did—you—know—that—was—my—husband?"

He did not move or speak. What was the use of trying—how could he explain intelligent guessing, the little

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fragments of memory stored up and the way she had looked as she knelt by that body. He knew because he was watching. And he was watching because he loved her. But it was no good. . . .

Her voice went on: measured, without hate, inexorable, like that of a judge.

"I think I would have let you go—to live out your life with your own conscience—but for these two things. First, I thought that you had no part in what happened in the cave. But that's a lie. You *were* there—you *knew*, today, that he would be there. Perhaps, you did the killing."

Then for the first time there was a change and a little tremor of feeling came into her voice.

"Then, you made me believe in you. After the *Tirpitz*—and when you were ill—I was so nearly sure. I started to like you—perhaps to feel something a little more. I started to hope. And all the time you knew you had done this. That cannot go on."

He did not answer, and he did not look at her face. He stared at the stiff sea grass between them beating sideways in the breeze and the little blue flowers nodding in time.

"So you have one minute to say your prayers. I had thought of handing you over to the police—but we are soft in this country, even to Quislings and murderers. They would only put you in prison. The minute starts from now."

Suddenly he was very tired and glad it was over. He thought of many things as the seconds dragged out—but most of all, of one his father had said to him long ago. "You can't take more out of life than you put in."

That was what he had tried to do. He got to his feet,

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still staring at the gun. He could not look at her face; he did not want to see the contempt in those violet eyes.

The rim of the muzzle was like a shining silver ring--a wedding ring--that grew bigger and brighter as he walked towards it.